

FROM THE  
LOG-BOOK  
OF  
MEMORY

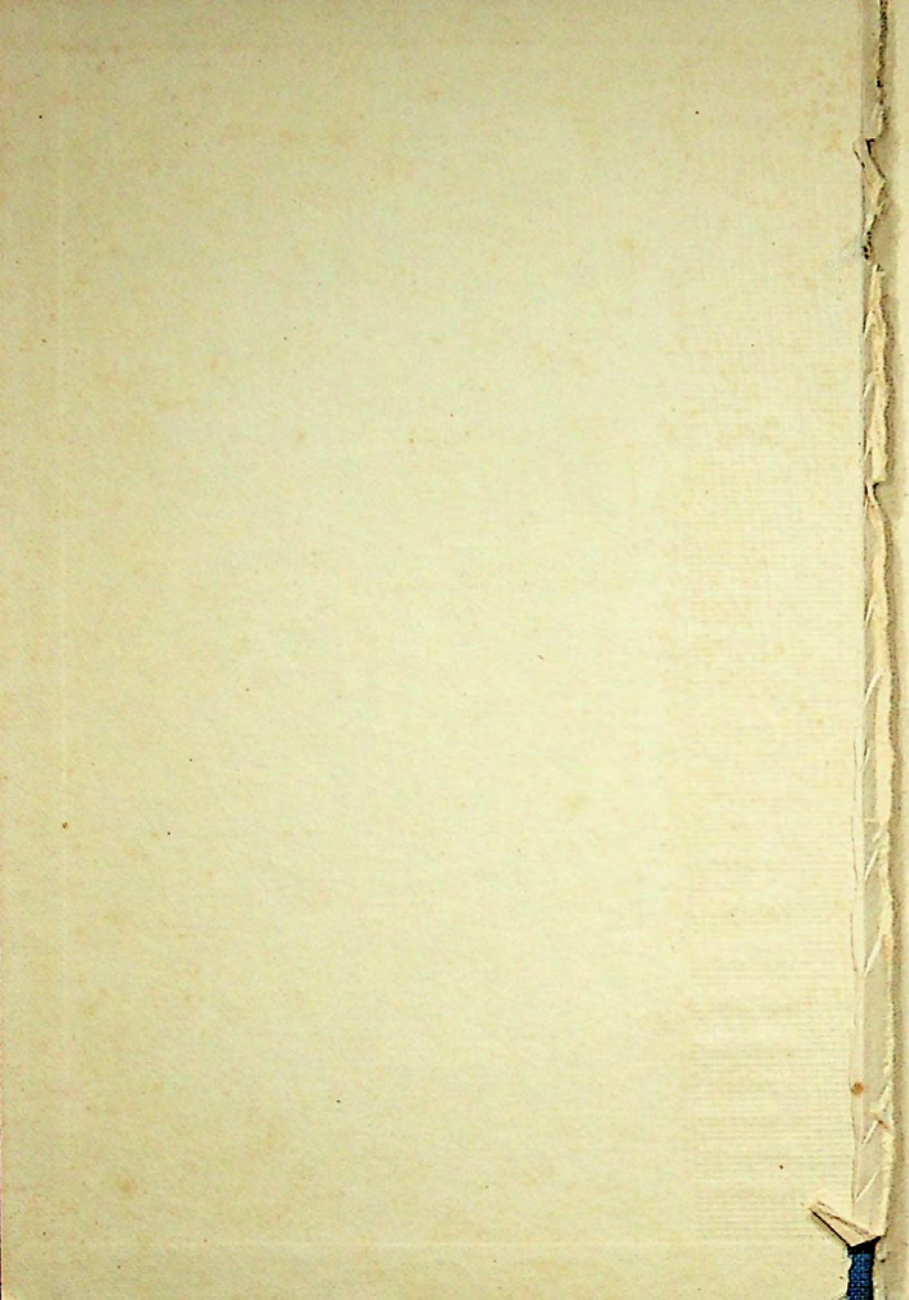
SHALIMAR

BLACKWOOD











FROM THE LOG-BOOK  
OF MEMORY

S. J. L. M. A. S.

OF C. J. J. J. J.

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OF MEMORY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRANK H. H. H. H.

William Blackwood & Sons Ltd.

Edinburgh and London

1914



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SHALIMAR

(F. C. HENDRY)

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# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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## FOREWORD

THE basis of this book is autobiography, and the five tales, each complete in itself, into which the book has been divided, have been placed in chronological order. Though separated both by time and distance, they constitute a straightforward record of my earlier manhood, when I was still highly susceptible to any romantic adventure that might be going. They range from the time when, having completed my apprenticeship in the very fine four masted barque *Routenburn* of Greenock, I obtained my first Board of Trade Certificate, till the time some seven years later, when I obtained my first command—always a red-letter day in a man's life.

The first two stories have for their background the days of sail as I knew them; when, though there were still more square sails than smoking funnels to be seen on the distant oceans, sail had passed its heyday, especially in the matter of keen sailing and rapid passages from port to port. The beautiful, swift, composite tea clippers had long vanished, killed by the Suez Canal; the equally beautiful iron wool clippers were just about to suffer the same fate; indeed my own old *Routenburn*, the last wool clipper to be built in this country,

was no longer in the wool trade. The world's fastest and most keenly sailed ships were the nitrate clippers trading to the west coast of South America. They were mostly French and German, and with their large homogeneous crews they made some wonderful passages. The prestige of the undermanned British sailing-ships had declined, though we still had some vessels that were second to none. One of those was the barque *John Lockett*, of Liverpool, with which the second of my stories deals.

The next two stories are about steamers with, for a background, the South China Sea and the Malay Archipelago, changed but little then from what they were when Conrad knew them, years before. Without knowing it, I had been in indirect contact with the great writer before I went to the East at all; for, as I discovered years later, the friend who advised me to go out to the Straits if I wanted to get a quick command—as told in the story "*Hazard in the Waihora*"—was the very man who gave Conrad his first employment out of Singapore.

When Conrad went to that port from Samarang and was admitted to hospital with injuries sustained while serving as mate of the full-rigged ship *Highland Forest*, as he tells in '*The Mirror of the Sea*,' my friend was master and part owner of the s.s. *Vidar*, a vessel of 800 tons running to Java, the Celebes, and the east coast of Borneo. Two months later Conrad, discharged from hospital, was signed on as chief officer of the *Vidar*. My friend never



spoke to me about Conrad as a writer, for he never knew him in that capacity—in fact I doubt if he ever mentioned the name; but I remember him holding up as an example to be followed, the most conscientious chief officer he ever had—a man who was heavily bearded because he had never shaved in his life, and who had learned to speak Malay fluently, though with a peculiar guttural accent, in an incredibly short time.

Before I had been long in the Straits the reading public was becoming aware of Conrad, though I met only one man who could truthfully claim to have met him. This man was really important, however, for he was none other than Captain Jim Lingard, generally believed to have been the original Lord Jim; and certainly, although he was elderly when I knew him, he tallied with the author's description of the physical characteristics of that exasperating hero, and knew all his haunts, including the river up which he met his death.

To write of those days has given me much pleasure, and I am glad to think readers may learn that, before racial prejudices and imported ideologies cast a blight over those parts of the East, there were happy ships like the *Waihora* and the *Flevo*; and kindly, trustful, and appreciative Chinese shipowners like Teo Tao Peng, with whom it was a privilege to serve.

There are two reasons why I decided to include the fifth tale, "The Escape of the *Roddam*":

firstly, because the whole story was told to me by the one man who could have told it, the principal actor, Captain Freeman; secondly, because it tells of one of the most marvellous escapes in the long history of seafaring, and of heroism and endurance almost beyond belief. The catastrophe that gave rise to it—the eruption of Mont Pelée and the total destruction of St Pierre—was one of the most complete disasters of all time, yet little is known about it; in fact little ever *was* known about it.

There are many reasons why the tremendous event received meagre publicity at the time. It happened before the almost universal use of radio; the only man who knew all the details found it difficult and painful to relate them; the place where it happened—Martinique—is French territory, and such literature about it as exists is mostly French, and mainly scientific, dealing with the cause of the disaster instead of with the event, of which, indeed, the authorities knew little, except that it certainly happened. *That* no one could doubt.

I wrote a chapter on the *Roddam* for my book, 'The Ocean Tramp,' published in 1938, from such information as I was able to glean, plus my own deductions; but though it contained nothing inaccurate—I took good care of that—it was far from being the whole story; even though it was the best I was able to do then. About a year after the book was published I became friendly with Captain Freeman, mainly through my writings in



'Blackwood's Magazine.' As a result here is the complete story, as he told it to me in his quiet drawing-room in Hove, where he was then living in retirement. By that time the passage of years had softened the memories of the agony he had endured, both mental and physical, and he could speak freely and without embarrassment. It will soon become obvious to the reader why he was the only man who could tell the story. I make no apology for including it in a personal record, for it was made personal to me in the telling. For hours Captain Freeman yarned to me as one sailor to another, and held me enthralled. A very precious and abiding memory !

In writing the other tales I have followed the principle that it is the story that matters and that it would be well to avoid self-assertiveness.

To carry on briefly with my life from the point where these memoirs end : After a time I reluctantly resigned command of the dear little *Flevo* to take up more lucrative and secure employment under the Government of Burma. For years I was in the Rangoon Pilot Service, piloting sea-going vessels up and down the intricate and dangerous stretch of river which runs from Rangoon into the Gulf of Martaban. Service as an officer of the Indian Army on the North-West Frontier followed ; then nearly five years of river and desert warfare in Mesopotamia, and a lengthy spell of home leave. After that there came a further period of service

on the Rangoon River; followed, in 1923, by retirement with the idea of leading the congenial life of a Scottish country gentleman. I did not quite get away with that, however, for various reasons; and for over twenty years I have been engaged in literary work.

Although those varied experiences have nothing to do with this book, they have, I think, helped me in the writing of it, especially with the principle I have mentioned; for if there is one thing they have taught me, it is to eschew egotism.

SHALIMAR.

## THE ABANDONMENT OF THE *KATHLEEN*

### I.

TOWARD the end of my apprenticeship in the four-masted barque *Routenburn* I would sometimes stand on the deck, look aloft, and wonder. There were in all thirty-one sails up there—eighteen square, thirteen fore and aft—supported by masts and yards, and a complicated network of standing and running rigging; and before very long, if I passed my examination for second mate, and was fortunate enough to find myself second mate of a vessel, I would often be responsible for the safety of just such a tall fabric. For the four hours of a watch on deck, night or day, often in inky darkness and generally alone, its immense leverage would be my immediate concern. Could I, still little more than a boy, act up to that ideal conception of myself as a sailing-ship second mate which I had set up? Could I face the varied situations—many of them likely to be created with alarming swiftness—and give instantly the correct order that might save sails from being blown away, masts



and yards from being damaged—even the ship from capsizing? Or would I be found wanting?

Again, could I command men? By that time, toward the end of the last century, deep-sea sailing-ships were manned by mixed crews of various nationalities, some of them the scum of the ports; and in a watch of, say, twelve men some were sure to be troublesome unless they were put very firmly in their places at once. A sailing-ship officer had to be able to use his fists at times—especially at the beginning of a voyage; and though I did not worry much about the physical result if such a course of action became necessary, I did fear the subsequent loss of prestige and authority that would follow a failure. Worst of all, I might find myself one of those who for some psychological reason was quite incapable of giving orders to white men.

It was true that I might go into steam right away, and that was what we all aimed at in time. There was, for instance, a very large company of passenger and cargo-steamers running round the Indian coast which often had vacancies for junior officers. They liked to catch presentable youths just after they obtained their first certificates, and bring them up in their own way. That promised a soft and pleasant life, with none of the drawbacks of sail; and many young officers, maintaining that they had heard the call of the East, gladly accepted the chance. On the face of it the prospect was alluring: no need to soil one's hands, as the

second mate of a sailing-ship, no matter how fine, had to do; immaculate white duck uniforms instead of old clothes; docile, brown-skinned lascars to deal with; and excellent, well-cooked food instead of salt junk and pea-soup. Anything more different to the job I eventually landed could hardly be imagined.

As I never put in an application to that company I do not know that I would have been accepted, though the chances were that I would; but I decided against it. I would try to prove my manhood by becoming an officer in sail and would remain in sail, anyhow until I obtained my first mate's certificate. Then I thought of a compromise: instead of the great, often unwieldy vessels I had been accustomed to, what about a handy little barque? A barque of less than a thousand tons, with only three masts, fewer and smaller sails, and, of course, a smaller crew? There were many such barques afloat in those days; surely I could get a berth in one of them.

The voyage ended, and after a short refresher course at the navigation school I had attended before I went to sea and between voyages, I passed for second mate; and with my nice new certificate in my pocket felt very much of a man. But something even better quickly followed. I received a letter from the captain of the *Routenburn* offering me the second mate's berth and, even better still, he would take my apprentice mate—and afterwards life-long friend—Jack Boag, as third. Jack was a



few months short of the sea-time necessary before he could go up for his second mate's examination, but a third mate did not require a certificate. Nothing could have been better; Jack was already a prime seaman and in accordance with ship's routine he would be in my watch. We both knew the *Routenburn*, and I felt that with him by my side I could face anything. The ship's husband—as the marine superintendent was called in those days—approved; and Jack and I were on top of the world. But not for long; like a bolt from the blue a letter came from the owners stating that in their view I was too young to be second mate of such a ship as the *Routenburn*, though they were prepared to take me on as third.

This was a shattering blow in more ways than one. The captain's letter had raised my self-confidence high; the owners' had knocked it flat. Since the third mate of a sailing-ship was not in sole charge of a watch, his service did not count for his next certificate, and I refused to waste time. I felt a deep sense of injustice, too; surely the captain, who knew my work, and the ship's husband, a very experienced shipmaster, could judge me better than a lot of pen-pushers in an office. To have argued would have been useless, however; it was the pen-pushers who owned the ship. Jack and I decided to go to the Bristol Channel and try our luck; and we chose Swansea because there we had friends who might have influence.



To be out of work and looking for a ship is one of the most disheartening experiences I have known. There were no pools or bureaux in those days; we had to depend entirely on our own efforts—and one of us seemed to be unemployable. Jack could have gone away as an able seaman in a steamer and got in his time that way, but he decided to stick to me; and I did not seem capable of fitting in anywhere. Youth and lack of experience blocked my way. Diffident though I was, I forced myself to go on board ships both in Cardiff and Swansea to inquire if they wanted a second mate, only to be asked if I had ever served in that capacity. The captain of one very fine full-rigged ship which I boarded—for I was getting somewhat reckless by then, I fear—told me that he wanted grown men for officers, not boys who had just cut the brass buttons off their uniform jackets to give them a spare Sunday suit. And the worst of it was that experienced second mates seemed to be as plentiful as seagulls round a fishing fleet. Jack and I were getting very sick of life just then; we were not badly off for money, but we were tired of idleness and doubt.

Then our luck turned, through a little bit of petticoat influence. I was introduced to the captain of the barquentine *Kathleen*, of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, then loading in Cardiff. He told me he did not usually carry a certificated second mate—instead he carried a boatswain who acted in that capacity—but if I did not mind hard

work he might take me for a change. I told him that I should welcome hard work, and, further, that I knew a fine young able seaman who positively revelled in it. Breathlessly I awaited his reply.

"All right; I'll take both—and I hope I won't regret it," the captain said. "Sign on in the Cardiff Shipping Office the day after to-morrow."

He was a big, burly man with a heavy moustache, and looked a hard case, as befitted the captain of a "blue-nose" barquentine; and neither his demeanour nor his conversation implied any favourable opinion of me as a prospective second mate of such a craft. Most of his attention seemed to be taken up by the gloves and cane I carried. He made the engaging of Jack and me appear almost like an act of charity—but I discovered later that his last two boatswains had never been sober in any port in which liquor could be obtained, and most of the men before the mast had suffered from the same complaint. As I hurried back to our lodgings I seemed to be walking on air. I had not even asked where the vessel was bound; what mattered was that our spell of idleness was over and that I had my foot on the first rung of the ladder of professional success. Never again would I be compelled to answer in the negative the question, "Have you been second mate before?"

I got back to our lodgings and found Jack passing the time by doing a bit of digging in the back garden. I told him what I had done.



"Will you come?" I asked him.

He beamed. "Will I come?" he cried. "When do we sign on?"

## II.

On the day appointed for signing on we went to Cardiff by train, put our gear in the left-luggage place, and walked down to the Shipping Office near the docks. Inside the building I found the captain. I did not exactly introduce Jack to him; I merely indicated that he was there, and the captain regarded him with apparent approval—in fact he seemed to be more favourably impressed by the idea of Jack as an able seaman than he had been of me as an officer. I looked round the room, which contained my future shipmates, including the mate and an individual who combined the duties of steward and cook, and certainly Jack looked more respectable, and more like a seaman, than any man or boy there—the mate not excepted.

The captain went behind a large counter and stood beside one of the shipping master's clerks while that gentleman rapidly and unintelligibly read through the articles of agreement for the forthcoming voyage. A few minutes later I had signed them in duplicate and become an officer of the *Kathleen*, assured in that position till the voyage ended. Then I turned to the man who had just



signed before me, and must, therefore, be the mate. As obliged by law, the clerk had mentioned the port to which we were bound in the first instance, but I had failed to pick it up, and told the mate so. "Terceira," he said pleasantly, as if glad to be on speaking terms.

"Never heard of it," I said.

"Neither had I, till the old man told me a few minutes ago; it's in the Azores. From there we go on to Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St Lawrence."

In those days the captain of a ship was "the old man," be his age twenty-two or ninety. After the last of the seamen had laboriously added his signature, we dispersed with a warning that we must be on board by six o'clock the following morning, without fail. As Jack and I were strangers in Cardiff we decided to go to a hotel and have a first-class lunch, then collect our dunnage from the railway station and go down to the ship. Two hours later we were in a cab, rattling through the streets on our way to the docks.

With difficulty we found the *Kathleen*, even after a dock official had told us where she was; and very insignificant she looked, lying just ahead of a great slab-sided steel barque, and close astern of a large North Atlantic cattle-boat taking in bunkers. The barquentine lay deep in the sooty waters of the dock, a wooden vessel painted black, with just a touch of her copper sheathing showing at the bows. We moved along aft till we came abreast

of her main hatch in which coal lay almost up to the coamings. Coal trimmers were putting on the hatch covers, but we managed to see the official number and registered tonnage which had been cut into the after-coaming. "Three hundred and fifty tons net register!" Jack read. "Whew!"

"I say, I never imagined she was as small as *that*," I said, apologetically.

Jack seemed to have become engaged in some sort of mental calculation. "We should just about reach the Grand Banks of Newfoundland at the beginning of winter; but I don't suppose we shall need any extra warm clothing," he said at last.

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, she's built of soft wood and will probably leak like a basket," he answered. "Haven't you heard that a spell at the pumps is as good as a monkey pea-jacket?"

Fortunately a strong sense of humour had been bestowed on both of us—a gift that was to stand us in good stead during some of the grim ordeals that lay ahead. Neither of us, especially Jack, could really take the *Kathleen* seriously. After what we had been used to, everything about her seemed to be in miniature, almost as if she were a model. The coal trimmers, having closed the hatch, filed on to the quay; evidently the loading had been completed. "If the carpenter were here he could get that hatch battened down now," Jack said.

I started. "Why, we haven't got a carpenter," I cried. "At least, there isn't one on the articles."



"There isn't," Jack confirmed with a grin. "I expect it'll be one of *your* jobs." And it was!

There was now nobody visible about the deck, which was flush fore and aft. The barquentine had no forecastle-head. Aft the foremast there was a large deckhouse, and aft the mizzenmast there was a square cabin skylight, with the companion-way leading down to the cabin in the forward part of it; only those and the coamings of the main and forepeak hatches rose above the level of the deck planking. Right aft stood the wheel and wheel-box, and right forward the windlass—a primitive one. There were two spare spars lashed along the low bulwarks, one on each side; there were the pumps, and very little else.

We got our sea-chests on board and the long, round canvas bags containing our bedding, then looked about to see where we could put them. At the forward end of the deckhouse there was a door leading into a fairly large room, which we entered. It contained eight bunks, and on one of the beams overhead there had been cut a notice: "Certified to accommodate 8 seamen." Some sarcastic genius had struck out the "accommodate" and substituted "suffocate." "This is certainly the fo'c'sle," Jack said. "I'll pick my bunk now and dump my dunnage into it."

"Well, that's you settled," I said. "I wonder where I live."

"Your room should be off the cabin aft," Jack suggested.



We went along the deck and found the companion-way door locked. Not a very hospitable reception, and I was inclined to resent it till we remembered we had been ordered to be on board by six o'clock next morning. Then we saw coming along the quay the man who had signed on as cook and steward. It turned out that he preferred to be called steward, and that is how I shall refer to him. He came on board and I asked him if he had the key of the companionway.

"I have, sir," he said, "but you don't live aft in this ship. You see, she's never had a certificated second mate before, so there's no room aft for one. I guess you'll have the bo's'n's room next door to the galley—and very snug and warm it will be when we get to the Gulf of St Lawrence."

This sounded bad, but it might have been worse. For one horrid moment I had feared that I might have had to live in the forecastle, and that would have meant the end of all discipline and dignity—in fact the end of all pretensions to being an officer.

The only fittings in the small den which the steward indicated were a bunk, a lamp, and two pegs for coats; and when we got my sea-chest inside there was little room for anything else. Still, it was my own. I spread my roll of bedding in the bunk and made my bed, then unpacked a working suit for the morning. I got out the enamelled wash-basin I had always carried as an apprentice but had not expected to use as an

officer, and shortly after that the steward came along. "I guess you won't want to go ashore again," he said.

"Only for a meal," I answered.

"I can fix that," he said. "How about some rashers of bacon and a couple of eggs apiece?"

"Splendid!"

"Right; Boag can have his in the galley, and I'll lay the cabin table for us. I always eat there—second table, you know."

I never tasted a better cooked meal, and before it was over I had taken a liking to the little steward. At first I had difficulty in placing him; at one moment I thought he was a Cockney, the next I decided he was an American. The explanation came later when he told me that he was born in London, but had been for years a cook in lumber camps in the States. The meal over, the steward vanished into his little pantry to wash up, and I went forward to join Jack. "I think I'm going to like this ship, old man," he said. "I never had a feed like that all the time we were in the *Routenburn*."

We paced the deck between the companionway and the deckhouse, a promenade about the length of a cricket pitch, and discussed our prospects. Every time we looked aloft the *Kathleen's* spars appeared to us like broomsticks compared with the *Routenburn's* massive masts and yards. Even more symbolic, the deckhouses that rose from the



four-masted barque's spacious main-deck were constructed of iron and had handsome teak doors with brass fittings; the *Kathleen's* deckhouse was built of soft wood and had wooden latches to the doors. All those things, and many others, we noticed, but there was no discontent in our minds; we were perfectly happy in our new surroundings—perhaps the ham-and-egg supper had something to do with it, though I prefer to think that romance had its share. Neither of us had ever imagined we would sail in an old wooden ship.

The evening turned chilly and we went into the galley, where the fire was still burning. After a time the steward came along from the cabin where he had been sorting out stores. He suggested that a mug of hot tea and some sandwiches would be welcome, and I agreed. Jack rose from the seat in front of the fire and made for the door. "No, sit down, Boag," the steward said. "It isn't every fo'c'sle-Jack that I would allow in my galley, but I gather from the second mate that you two were apprentices together in your last ship, and if *he* doesn't mind I guess it's O.K. with me."

After that we sat on in the galley, smoking and listening to the steward's yarns about the lumber camps and the North-West Mounted Police, for he had worked in Canada, too. Then something happened that scattered us; a hail came from the quay. "That'll be the old man; I'd better go and meet him," the steward said.



## III.

I do not know when the mate arrived, but he was there when we turned out in the morning; and just before six o'clock the rest of the hands straggled on board. The mate was a quiet, rather nervous little Welshman, and did not bear even a remote resemblance to the traditional iron-fisted mate of a "blue-nose" hell packet; but a few minutes later the captain came out of the companion-way and his first order was given in a voice that made me jump. It could have been heard up in Bute Road. "Mr Lloyd," he roared to the mate, "get the gear rigged and have the deck washed down."

This was the real thing, and all hands got moving smartly. A small spar with a block and fall was rigged over the offshore rail, and water was drawn up in a large canvas bucket. This was emptied into a wooden wash-deck bucket, from which I swilled the water on to the deck while the hands scrubbed with brooms. As I was anxious to make a good impression I was glad I had my sea-boots on and did not require to go to my room to don them. By eight o'clock the deck had been washed down, the paintwork swabbed and a lot of coal-dust removed. About ten o'clock, it being tide time, a steam tug came to tow the *Kathleen* to sea. It was a disagreeable day with almost continuous drizzling rain.

Almost at once the insignificance of the vessel I had joined was rubbed well into me. We warped her through the lock by hand, and when through, a boy and I easily hauled in the after mooring lines. Then shortly after clearing the lock gates the tug let go. I had sailed out of the Bristol Channel a few times and had always towed down to Lundy Island. The barquentine, under all sail and doing a bare six knots, was hardly an hour at sea before it became evident that the pilot also would soon be gone; for through the rain his cutter came in sight, head-reaching under short canvas. Her dinghy was towing astern; it was let go and, manned by one small boy, came bobbing across our bow and ranged alongside the main chains on the lee side. The pilot wished the captain a pleasant voyage, clambered into the chains, and dropped into his boat; so low was our freeboard that he did not require a ladder.

Soon after he left we discovered we had a stowaway. From under the longboat, which was lashed upside down on the main hatch, there crawled a large, bedraggled tom-cat, almost black with coal-dust. For a few moments he stood on the hatch, obviously taking his bearings, then he jumped down to the deck and made for the galley. About an hour later, when I passed, he was sitting on the bench in front of the fire, digesting a meal and trying to clean himself. He had persuaded the steward to adopt him.

Steadily, heeling over to a nice breeze well abaft



the starboard beam, the *Kathleen* moved towards the open ocean. She was no record breaker. Hard driven, nine knots would be about the best she could do, I estimated; but she had a rough beauty of her own as she stood down the ever-widening Bristol Channel that bleak afternoon. Her low black hull had rusty streaks in the way of the chain plates, but the copper bottom-sheathing gleamed coquettishly under her white figurehead every time she lifted to a wave. Her sails were dirty with coal-dust and sodden with rain, but they had been nicely cut and they set well; and, without doubt, every sailing-craft, no matter how humble, borrows dignity from her sail-spread, and a grace of movement from the restless sea.

About six o'clock the composition of the two watches—port and starboard—was announced. They were not picked by the mates time about, with the mate having the first choice, as in a big ship; instead the captain arranged them, and in doing so displayed what to me seemed the wisdom of Solomon. To my great satisfaction, Jack was in the starboard watch with me, and with him was another able-bodied seaman named Jansen. A glance at him revealed his race; pale-blue eyes and light straw-coloured hair proclaimed the Scandinavian. He was, in fact, a Swede, and therefore likely to be a good sailor. The mate had three in his watch, but I did not grudge him that; for if he had quantity, I had quality. He had Paddy, an Irish A.B., who had been a good sailor but was



past his best ; Mathews, a hefty apprentice, and John, a boy making his first voyage.

At eight o'clock I went aft to keep my first watch as an officer. Darkness came down, but the rain had ceased. The captain had gone to his room, and the mate gave me the course. There was no ceremony about changing the watches ; Jansen took over the wheel from Paddy, and Jack relieved Mathews on the look-out. The mate went below and left me in charge, and never has a watch been kept with greater vigilance. From his post forward Jack kept on reporting lights which seemed to be everywhere, for the traffic was heavy. I examined each one with scrupulous care ; if I was doubtful of them passing clear I took compass bearings of them. I felt my responsibility keenly, and dodged from one side of the deck to the other like a cat on hot bricks. Once, when rather puzzled, I even wished the captain would come on deck instead of showing such implicit confidence in an untried young officer. I did not know the captain then.

In my spare moments, when not examining lights, I watched the sails lest they should require trimming to a shift of wind. As opposed to the *Routenburn's* thirty-three sails, the *Kathleen* had fifteen—five of them square sails on the foremast, the others fore-and-afters. In particular I studied the big fore-and-aft main and mizzen sails, and the gaff topsails above them. Those gaffs were hoisted by means of throat and peak halliards,

and since I had never been shipmates with anything like them, I wanted to get thoroughly conversant with the gear in case of a sudden emergency.

The first two hours passed more quickly than any two hours of a watch had ever passed before, and at ten o'clock, by the clock inside the companionway, I struck four bells. Jack relieved the wheel and Jansen went on the look-out. Jack's only comment about steering this strange vessel was that the wheel felt like a toy in his hands, and he certainly got the hang of her at once. About half-past ten a green light appeared on the lee bow, and I soon discovered its bearing was not altering. I got my binoculars on to it and saw that it was being shown by a large barque, in ballast trim, which, close-hauled on the starboard tack, was heading across our bows. The *Kathleen* was running free, so I had to take avoiding action. "Up helm, Boag! let her go off three points!" I ordered.

"Let her go off three points, sir," Jack answered.

The barquentine was very handy on her helm, and it was thrilling to see her swinging away from the wind under the first steering order I had ever given. It brought the barque right ahead and she soon opened out clear.

"Ease the helm! Steady!"

"Steady it is, sir!" said Jack.

The barque was now on the weather bow and altering her bearing rapidly. It had been a simple manœuvre, but the memory of it is with me still,

after all those years, while hundreds of more important events have been completely forgotten. Half an hour later we cleared most of the traffic, and lights appeared less frequently. A half-moon came up and shone brilliantly. Still the captain did not appear, and if I had known him as well then as I came to know him later I would not have expected him to; so fond of his bunk was he that it would take far more to keep him from it than a young officer keeping his first watch in charge of a vessel passing through heavy traffic.

The *Kathleen* sailed leisurely on, making hardly a sound but the faint splash of the breaking bow-wave. Aloft, the sails, drawing nicely, seemed to be asleep. A coasting steamer came close, but all I had to do about that was to see that our lights were burning brightly. Midnight came and I made eight bells; my first watch as an officer was over.

#### IV.

As the *Kathleen* sailed peacefully to the southward the weather became balmy and pleasant, and with most of the coal-dust gone she was a more attractive vessel in which to live. Perhaps what surprised and pleased me most was the quantity and excellence of the food. Apprentices in deep-sea sailing-vessels at that time, with a few exceptions, were generally hungry, with a hunger which is an abiding memory with most of us.



Recollections of half-deck days, happy because we were young, recall breakfasts consisting of bare, flinty biscuits and black coffee with neither milk nor sugar; dinners of salt beef or pork, from which we tried to save small portions so that we might have a little more than biscuits and black tea, again without milk and sugar, for supper; and, most satisfying of all, thick pea-soup three times a week. And those breakfasts were often eaten after a long, cold night on deck; the meagre, slushy dinners on days of tropical heat. Every Friday we had our little weekly whack of sugar, butter or marmalade; every Monday found our store-tins empty. Three times a week we got small portions of soft bread; on Saturdays a few ounces of rice and on Sundays some duff—railway duff, a currant at each station. Figure out a menu that never varied for months on end, and believe that we were usually hungry. Hungry! we were continually taking fresh reefs in our belts to prevent our trousers from slipping down! Of course, the officers in the cabin fared better; they had spiced, white cabin biscuits which could be easily chewed.

In the *Kathleen*, cabin and forecastle each had the same crisp white cabin biscuits and plenty of soft bread, and there was always something extra in the forecastle for breakfast and supper. Jack told me they had bacon and eggs for breakfast twice during the first week. Bacon and eggs for seamen! it would have caused the old steward of

the *Routenburn* to die of heart failure. And if they fared well, we did much better. I never had that horrible empty feeling that caused us to tighten our belts, on board the *Kathleen*.

After a few days at sea I had got my shipmates pretty well summed up, and had come to the conclusion that we were blessed with a happy little ship. To begin with: the burly captain, in spite of his stern demeanour and stentorian commanding voice, was easy-going and good-natured—and a sincere if unostentatious Christian. From the point of view of an experienced officer, even from mine after a day or two, he had that great virtue—he seldom interfered with the work; and he rarely remained on deck for more than a few minutes at a time. He was a great reader and, as I have indicated, he loved his bunk; he spent every afternoon in it and he went to it every night at eight o'clock; and after that it took something very unusual to get him out before eight o'clock the next morning. His dealings with the crew were of a paternal nature, which was not big-ship fashion; indeed, neither the change from screws for setting up shrouds and backstays to old-style hemp lanyards and dead-eyes, nor the difference between the dry well and bilges of an iron ship and pumping this one out at least three times every twenty-four hours, struck me so forcibly as this paternal treatment.

Then the mate: anyone easier for a young officer to get on with never existed. He had just



joined the *Kathleen* after months of unemployment and had been so long in steamers that he had almost lost touch with masts and sails. He, also, was kindly and easy to get on with, and on occasions absent-minded; his face wore a perpetual smile. He had been down on his uppers before he got this job, and had even been compelled to sell his sextant. He, also, adopted friendly methods when dealing with the hands—and it seemed to me that the only persons on board with strict ideas about discipline were Jack and myself.

Strange to say it was Jansen, the only alien on board, who first took advantage of what seemed to me to be rather a lax state of discipline, and threatened the peace of the *Kathleen*. The Swede, quite a powerful, well-built man, had crept meekly on board at Cardiff, relying on his skill as a seaman, and a servile obedience to orders, to save him from the dose of "belaying-pin soup" which he knew was frequently served out to men before the mast in "blue-nose" vessels; then when he discovered that neither blows nor even harsh words were forthcoming, disturbing ideas about equality and the rights of man came to him. He apparently resolved to put those ideas into practice, and I was to become his first victim. I soon showed him where he got off; then, being a bully by nature, he sought a victim in the fore-castle, for a change.

The victim he chose was his companion in the starboard watch, Jack Boag—a calamitous error from which I could have saved him; for I knew



that Jack was one of the few apprentices who had boxed five full rounds with the Rev. James Fell, the famous fighting parson of Frisco, and had indeed come very close to knocking the reverend gentleman out. The encounter on the *Kathleen's* deck was short and decisive, and Jansen emerged from it a very much wiser and much battered man. When he recovered after two days, during which I had to have the boy, John, in my watch as a substitute, he resolved to be a good little boy in future, and again the *Kathleen* became a happy ship.

Then there was our other shipmate, our stowaway. After he had got himself perfectly clean he turned out to be a very handsome cat, and he became the apple of the steward's eye. He had a leonine head and powerful limbs. His sleek, glossy coat was grey, with darker grey markings, and his chest was snowy white. We discussed a name for him, and in the interests of alliteration I suggested Charlie—Cardiff Charlie; but the steward would not have it. It was too common a name for such an aristocratic looking animal. Then what about Claude? The steward was delighted. "' Claude ' it will be," he cried. "Cardiff Claude!"

A more complete snob than Claude when he settled in never existed. Normally his home was in the galley, but occasionally he visited the cabin, usually when the steward was working in his pantry; and on alternate days, when it was my afternoon watch on deck, he would curl up in my bunk; but he treated the hands before the mast with lofty

disdain and never once put a paw inside the fore-castle.

Soon after the encounter between Jack and Jansen we began to look for land. As the mate had no sextant the captain did the navigation, and he kept the ship's position to himself. All we knew was that homeward bound ships coming up from the southward used often to sight one of the western outposts of the Azores, and from there, with any luck and a fair wind, they would be in the vicinity of the English Channel in less than a week; yet we were now ten days out and had seen nothing at all since the day after we left. Jack still seemed to be treating the *Kathleen* as a sort of a joke; he even thought of the good food he was getting as due to an eccentricity on the part of somebody—either the captain or steward, or both, he supposed—and now he was wondering if the same applied to the navigation. One evening when he was at the wheel he spoke about it. "I wonder if the old man knows where he is," he said.

"Of course he does," I answered.

I was on sure ground; for I knew the captain had been an officer in a line of mail and passenger steamers running down to West Africa, and indeed had only left it because he could not shake off the fever he had acquired on the coast.

"I suppose you're right," Jack said, "but at the moment I feel much as Columbus must have felt just before he blundered across the Bahamas."



The remark was more apt than may be imagined ; for although all this happened just before the close of the last century, the difference between the *Santa Maria* of Columbus and the *Kathleen* was infinitesimal compared with the difference between that same *Kathleen* and the next vessel in which I crossed the North Atlantic as an officer less than four years later—the giant Cunarder *Ivernia*.

There was, of course, nothing wrong with the navigation ; when we made the island next morning it was dead ahead ; the jib-boom was pointing straight at a conical black peak thrusting upward from an unsubstantial base in the blue haze. Gradually, as we sailed steadily towards it, a potato-shaped island fringed by a steep rock-bound coast rose over the horizon. The country beyond the cliffs was open and treeless, and the island might have been one of the Orkneys, only more hilly, darker and warmer. The breeze was sending cloud-shadows sweeping across the ridges, and here and there puffs of dust that might have been coal-dust arose, though what coal-dust would be doing there I could not imagine. Through my binoculars I could see scattered stone-built villages.

Again the proceedings bordered on the comic ; for though the captain had found the island with unerring precision, it soon became evident that he did not know which side of it contained his port. There were few signs of life ; close to the cliffs a fishing-boat was coasting along, heading to the



southward; not far inland a peasant wearing a wide straw hat was ploughing a field with a pair of oxen. Under short canvas the *Kathleen* also coasted along, but farther out. It was drawing toward noon and the captain got tired of this dodging; doubtless he was afraid he might miss his afternoon nap. "Most of the bad weather round here comes from the westward, so we're on the lee side of the island," he said to the mate. "Stand by the anchor."

With Jansen keeping the hand-lead going we tood in till we were less than a mile from the beach, then anchored. We had our mid-day meal—for the first time I sat with the other two at the cabin table—then the captain went to his bunk, having warned me to call him should anybody come alongside. Nobody did until well on the next forenoon; then a fishing-boat with some fish to sell ranged alongside. No one in it could speak English; no one in the *Kathleen* knew a word of Portuguese. The steward went down into the boat, selected a large tunny-fish and paid for it by slapping an English shilling on the thwart. We took off one of the main-hatch covers and signed to the skipper of the boat to come on board. The captain pointed to the coal in the square of the hatch and shrugged his shoulders inquiringly. A gleam of comprehension came over the Portuguese fisherman's face. "*Si, si, el vino fabrika,*" he cried.

"That means wine factory, sir," said the mate, who knew a little Spanish.

"Anybody knows that much," the old man growled, "but where is it?"

A mute appeal to the fisherman brought a mute but expressive reply. He pointed to the headland that bounded our view to the south, and with his hand made an imaginary sweep to the westward round it. "We're on the wrong side of the island, Mr Lloyd," the captain cried. "Heave a-weigh."

We hove up the anchor, set all sail to the light northerly breeze and moved along the coast, keeping a good look-out for breaking water that would indicate outlying reefs. We rounded the headland, brought the wind abeam on the starboard side and continued our cruise. The coastline was high, precipitous and forbidding, with bases of accumulated masses of fallen rock. As we coasted along, a biggish collection of houses opened out clear of another headland just forward of the beam. "This looks like something civilised," the captain said to the mate. "Shorten down to fores'l, mains'l, mizzen and jibs; then stand-by to anchor."

Under short canvas we were moving through the water at about two knots when I saw, well up a hillside, a long, low building from which there rose a smoking chimney. I was standing with the captain at the time and called his attention to it. "That looks like the wine factory, sir," I said.

"It does, and this looks like an anchorage," he answered.

He pointed to a pebbly beach with a sort of sea-wall behind it and some fishing-boats drawn up



on it. It lay between the cliffs, just short of the town we had opened out. We stood in, and when the beach was about half a mile distant, the helm was put down and the barquentine shot up into the wind with all her sails fluttering. "Let go," the captain shouted.

The starboard anchor splashed into the water and the chain cable ran out. "Brought up, sir," the mate reported.

## V.

We had reached the right place at last and the first leg of the voyage was over. Some people came off from the shore, including a uniformed official, the man to whom the coal was consigned, and a ship-chandler prepared to supply fresh provisions. The latter was also, we understood, a sort of British vice-consul; and certainly he spoke good English and acted as interpreter to the others. From him we learned that there were no lighters available; the coal would have to be taken ashore in fishing-boats, and few of them could carry more than a ton at a time. Even though, as the interpreter informed us, there would be a steady procession of them, it looked as if our stay at Terceira would be a lengthy one; and he confirmed this as a sort of an afterthought by telling us that, of course, there would be surf-days—days when the boats would be unable to come out through the surf



beating on the small strip of pebbly beach. However, the captain did not seem to worry, so why should we.

It was announced that owing to lack of shore labour we should have to discharge the cargo ourselves; but the weather was mild, the sky and the sea were blue; and we had that priceless boon to a sailor—"all night in." There was no watch-and-watch—four hours on deck; four hours below, perhaps (for how often when at sea was our short period of sleep shattered into sudden wakefulness by the dreaded call: "All hands on deck!"). And we could look forward to something like a banquet every day. Those owners of the *Kathleen* in Prince Edward Island must have had liberal minds; for the captain showed no anxiety about the size of his portage bills, and the steward seemed to order what he liked. Every day fresh provisions came off, and oranges and bananas were plentiful. On the first Sunday at anchor we had quail-on-toast for supper in the cabin, and in the forecastle they had roast chicken for dinner. Another welcome eccentricity!

The discharging of cargo began at six o'clock in the morning and continued all day, so long as there were boats alongside. In the hold two of the hands shovelled coal into bags, while the others hove up the bags, one at a time, by a midship fall led to a hand dolly-winch. When the bags came up clear of the coaming of the hatch I ran them across the deck and lowered them into the boat



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with the help of another fall led from the fore-yard-arm. The mate tallied the bags as they went over the side: the captain took no apparent interest in the proceedings. Each boat as it returned brought back empty bags; and though at first we seemed to make little impression on the five-hundred-odd tons of coal in the hold, the ship gradually rose higher out of the water.

For over a week all went well, then we woke one morning to find a swell running into the open roadstead and the sky clouded over. Only one boat came off and it did not stay long; it lay alongside, rising and falling uneasily till half-loaded, then the skipper announced his intention of leaving. He pointed to the sky, and to the little beach where boats, tightly packed, were drawn up in a row above high-water mark. "Feenish, feenish; big wind coming, *pouf*," he yelled. "Let go rope."

I cast off the rope which held him alongside and he shook out his sail, slipped under our stern and headed for the beach. A few minutes later we saw him passing safely through the surf. We covered the hatch and called it a day. The clouds thickened, turning from white to dark grey, and a threatening purple gleam came over the sky to the south-west. "We're for it," I said to the mate, who shrugged his shoulders and, after a moment's hesitation, agreed.

The swell increased, and soon the barquentine was plunging heavily, with the cable grinding hard on the windlass and in the hawse-pipe. About



noon the captain decided to drop the other anchor and pay out more cable. With sixty fathoms out on the starboard chain we seemed to lie more easily, and the captain, after stating his belief that she could now ride out anything, retired to his bunk. I sincerely hoped he was right, for the picture was an ugly one. About half a mile astern were inhospitable, sheer cliffs towering to over two hundred feet, while everything—breaking seas, flying spray, and storm-driven clouds—was hurtling straight toward them. The noise of the surf thundering on their bases came off to us even in the teeth of the wind.

The *Kathleen* rode it out all night, though she pitched very heavily, and with the weather getting no worse we were beginning to think the captain had been right. But when I went along to my room after breakfast I became aware of a sort of sawing, splintering sound forward, and saw Jack Boag and Jansen looking over the bows. "The starboard hawse-pipe has carried away, sir, and the chain is cutting down into the hull planking," Jack reported.

I joined them and, looking down, saw a pretty grim sight. Where the iron hawse-pipe had been there was now a ragged hole in the hull, with the cable from the windlass leading out through it; and as the bows reared upward the chain, which was taut as a bar and trending straight ahead, sawed at the wood beneath. I saw splinters of wood flying even as I watched, and sawdust dropping into the sea. I ran aft and reported to the captain,

who listened attentively, then moved with a celerity of which I had not thought him capable. He was forward as soon as I was, surveying the damage with the eye of an experienced seaman, and ready with the remedy.

"Get the towing-spring up out of the forepeak, mister," he said to the mate.

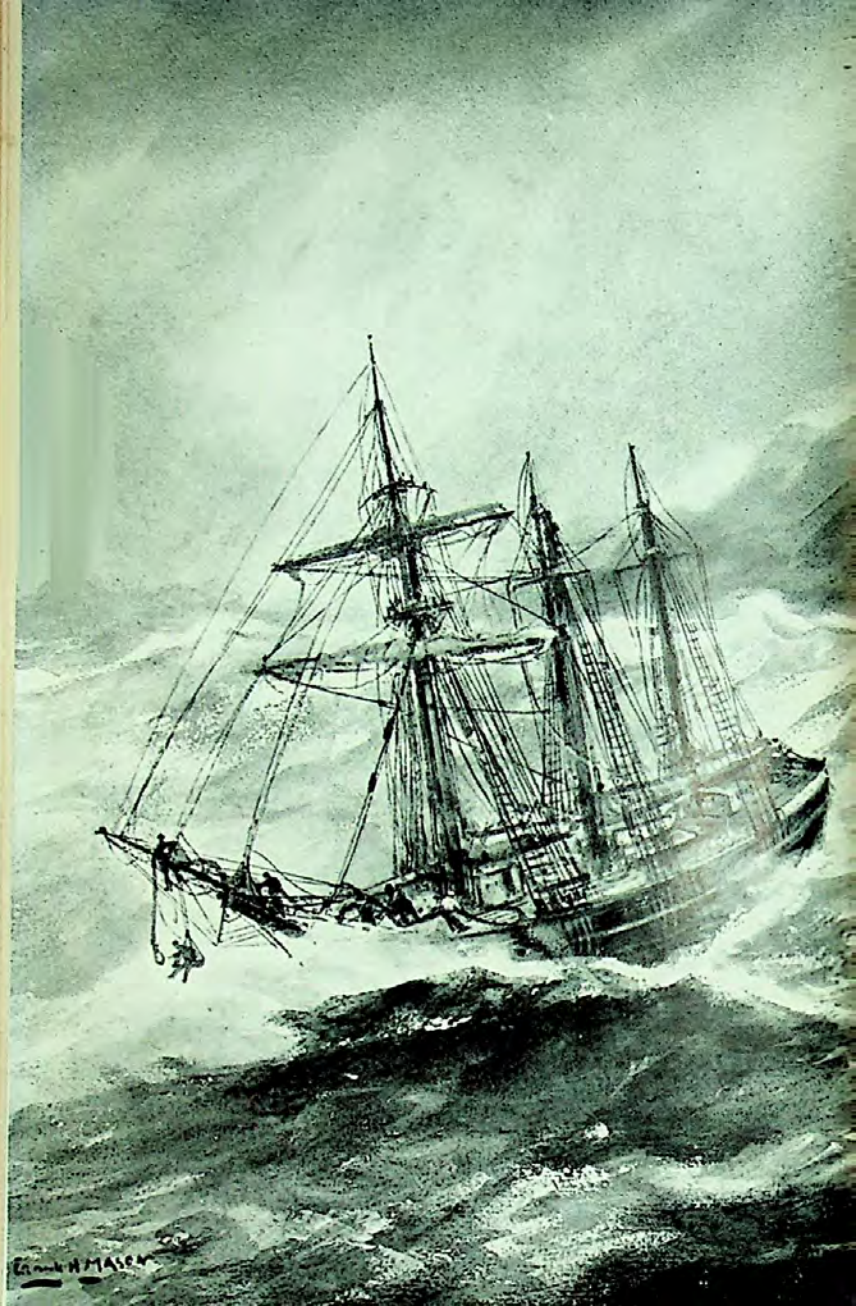
The towing-spring was an eight-inch coir hawser with plenty of give in it, and the idea was to lash the end of it to the cable, heave it taut, make it fast to the stout towing-post, then slack out the cable so as to let the spring take the strain. After that we would hang a kedge anchor over the bows, and under the cable, to act as a temporary hawse-pipe. To lash the spring to the cable—as the use of a boat would be impossible—it would be necessary for a man to go out over the bows and sit in a boatswain's chair—a short, stout plank suspended from a rope bridle. The captain decided that to give the spring sufficient drift, and to ensure that the man putting on the lashing would not be dashed against the dolphin striker as the bows were thrown upward, the boatswain's chair must hang from the jib-boom just forward of the bowsprit cap. The spring having been ranged along the deck, the end, which had a heavy galvanised iron thimble spliced into it, was taken out along the bowsprit; everything was ready.

"Now, who'll go out there and do the job?" the captain asked.

Jack stepped forward at the same moment as I



*KATHLEEN* OFF TERCEIRA

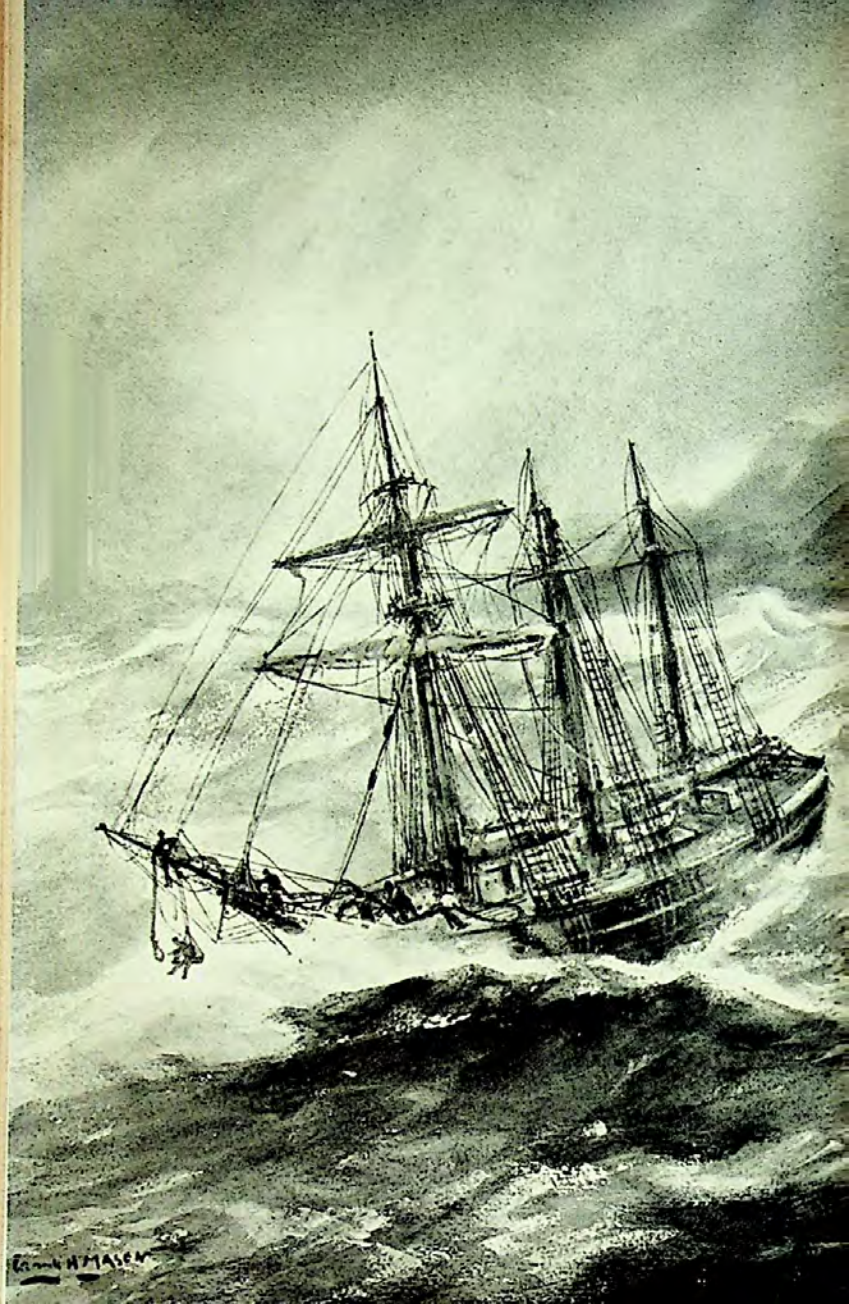




did, but I waved him aside—and I thought the old man was pleased. He had the same idea as I had, that if there was a dangerous, unpleasant job to be done, an officer should do it. "Right; we'll do our best to look after you," he said.

The only way they could do that was by fastening a rope round me so that they could haul me back aboard if one of the heavy breaking waves washed me out of the chair. I got down into the chair, which was hanging at the correct height, and crossed my feet under the chain cable. Up went the bows and, of course, the chain to which I clung, and before I had time to feel giddy they dropped again, and I felt as if the pit of my stomach was falling out. The sea closed over me, and as I emerged dripping with the next skyward surge I was completely confused, and my head was spinning as I shot upward again.

Above me Jack was sitting astride the jib-boom, ready to swing the thimble in the spring toward me. I cleared my eyes of water and motioned to him to hang on for a bit till I got my breath and recovered my wits. After a few more frantic plunges and giddy uplifts, the barquentine seemed to settle down for a moment or two, and I got the end of my lashing through a link in the cable and round the thimble which Jack had swung close to me. I was now free to use both hands, and between immersions, whenever I had a chance to breathe, I managed to lash the spring to the chain. The captain was satisfied with the job and shouted to





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me to come in. Jack helped me on to the bowsprit ; I crawled along it like a half-drowned rat and gained the deck ; and from that moment I fancied that the captain recast his ideas about big-ship apprentices. Anyhow, Jack and I seemed to become golden-haired, blue-eyed boys who could do no wrong.

We hove the spring taut, then slacked out some cable so that we could get the kedge boused well up under it ; then we secured the kedge in position, and a very efficient substitute hawse-pipe it made. By supper-time the job had been done and we had no more trouble with it, though we had plenty in other ways. As I have said, the captain was a thorough seaman, when he liked.

That particular gale never became a full-sized one ; the wind went round to the west and the boats were again able to use the beach, now sheltered by the cliffs. We had seen enough, however, to realise that our anchorage could be very dangerous, and for a few days we worried about it and anxiously studied the weather signs. But with the careless buoyancy of youth we soon forgot ; the sky and the sea were blue again, and the sun shone ; the steward continued to be good to us—and we got rid of a further couple of hundred tons of coal before the next interference.

## VI.

One morning the mate and I got out on deck at six o'clock, ready to turn the hands to, but we



never took off the hatch-covers. The weather looked threatening and again a swell was setting in from seaward. There was only one boat alongside ; it had brought empty bags to be filled, but did not wait for the filling ; instead, after the bags had been passed aboard, the fisherman pointed to the beach, then cast off and made for it. We followed the boat with our eyes ; half a dozen other boats were making for the beach—the only one on that side of the island—and the boats already there were being tightly packed.

At eight o'clock we went aft for breakfast, and when the captain joined us I could see that he was worried by something more serious than merely having had to rise from his bunk. The mate told him the cargo work was stopped as there were no boats. " I don't wonder at it," he answered gloomily. " The glass has gone right back ; I never saw such a steep drop."

Just after we got back to the deck we saw a boat approaching, but it did not try to come alongside ; instead, one of the fishermen threw over a piece of wood to which was attached a letter addressed to the captain. At that time weather forecasting had not attained a very high standard of accuracy, but there *was* a meteorological station at Terceira, and the letter was from its superintendent. It conveyed a warning that a hurricane was approaching the island.

Had there been time, and had our starboard hawse-pipe been intact, the captain might have

decided to try to beat out to sea. He might, of course, have buoyed and slipped the cables, but I imagine he knew he could never recover them, and without anchors we should have been helpless. Anyhow, he decided to ride it out where he was. He was now thoroughly roused, and under his personal supervision we got really busy. To decrease the wind pressure aloft he ordered the three top-masts to be housed, and soon Jack and Jansen were swaying dizzily aloft getting the royal and topgallant yards ready for sending down ; while the rest of us lashed the other end of the coir spring to the port cable, this time just forward of the windlass. We worked like beavers till just before sunset, and by then the *Kathleen*, straining hard at her cables, looked very short and stumpy aloft.

It was not so bad while we were busy, but with idleness there came a dreadful suspense. There were signs that the dreaded visitor was close at hand, and very soon it burst over us with unbelievable fury. The wind shrieked like a fiend through the scanty rigging, and great billows roared in from seaward to break with ever-increasing thunderous fury on the cliffs astern. The scene was one of awe-inspiring desolation. The black scud was tearing across the sky at a terrific speed ; the rolling surface of the roadstead, now shrouded in flying spindrift, was completely deserted save for the *Kathleen* plunging up and down in the centre of it. And how she plunged ! As a great sea rushed at her she would throw up her bows to meet it, and



the whole of her coppered fore-foot could be seen with the two cables leading seaward as taut as iron bars; then down she would swoop into the trough as if her jib-boom were trying to stab the next oncoming wave. Occasionally a cross-wave would rush at her, causing her to sheer wildly.

By nine o'clock it seemed to me that the true hurricane wind was blowing. It was pitch dark and the spray was almost blinding; there was no visible a single object of which I could get a bearing. I went into my room and tried to read, but could not settle, so I made my way aft to speak to the mate. I found him also trying to read, but with difficulty because of the violent swinging of his lamp. "Look here, sir," I said to him, "don't you think we should keep an officer's anchor watch on a night like this?"

"Is it necessary?" the smiling little man asked. "You know the old man says she can't possibly drag with that amount of chain out."

"I'm not so sure of *that*," I retorted. "The weather has got much worse than when he last saw it."

I glanced at the captain's door, but it was closely shut and I did not dare to disturb him; I thought I must be unduly anxious and returned to my room. But I could not settle; forward there I could feel the seas breaking against the bows with the noise and force of a mammoth sledge-hammer, and the spray was flying clean over the deckhouse. The cables were groaning and grinding; there

must have been a terrific strain on the windlass. A murmur of voices came from the forecastle. The forecastle! I would call Jack Boag. Why hadn't I thought of that before!

I opened the door and saw him sitting on the edge of his bunk, looking worried. He came out on deck and I found that he thoroughly agreed with me with regard to an officer's anchor watch; if the neglect of that was part of the great *Kathleen* joke, it was a thoroughly bad part. "There's only one way to make sure she isn't dragging, and that is to use the deep-sea lead," I said to him.

Between us we got the heavy lead and the lead-line out of the locker in which they were stowed, and carried them aft as far as the mizzen rigging. We lifted the lead over the side and dropped it on the bottom, then waited to see how the line would grow. Before long it was trending right ahead. "Merciful heavens! she is dragging!" Jack cried in horror.

To deal with that was beyond my power. The only remedy was to pay out more cable, and with springs on both the chains that would be a complicated business; indeed, the one that I had lashed to the starboard cable would have to be cut. Again I sought the cabin, this time in no uncertain mood, and knocked loudly on the captain's door. The only answer was a sleepy grunt. The mate came out of his cabin and asked what was the matter, and the ship herself answered. She shivered all over, and from forward came the sound



of a violent crash. A quick lurch over to starboard and the mate was thrown against the table; a moment later he was thrown back again, and the captain, whose door was now wide open, was thrown on top of him. Instead of pitching, the vessel was now rolling; she was no longer being held head to wind and sea. Perhaps she was pounding on the rocks, though I heard no crash after the first.

I hurried up the companionway and gained the reeling spray-swept deck. As I reached it I was aware of men hurrying aft. They joined the captain and mate, who had gone right along to the taffrail. Nobody knew what had happened. The mate thought she *was* on the rocks; the captain, who was staring astern as if trying to pick out the cliffs through the curtain of spray, said nothing. I looked for Jack among the men hanging on beside the wheel, but could not see him. "Are you there, Boag?" I asked.

I got no reply; what could have happened to him? I started to move forward along the deck, and the bows lifted until I seemed to be walking up a hill; a few seconds later and I was staggering down the hill, not quite under control. I reached the deckhouse without seeing him and forced the fore-castle door open. There he was, sitting on his sea-chest and smoking his pipe. "What are you doing for'a'd here?" I demanded.

"What are *you* doing aft there?" he countered. "This is the safest place in the ship—at present."

Calmly he argued with me, displaying even in

those early days some of that same judgment which in later years helped to make him a successful commander of cargo liners. To begin with he explained, in self-justification, there had been no order to go aft; the hands had just rushed along in panic. He maintained that when the *Kathleen* hit the rocks the masts and spars would come crashing down, and for various reasons—obvious to me now, though I had not thought of them before—they would fall aft. He had no intention of going along there to be killed by falling spars, he said; instead, he preferred to stay where he was till she struck, then go aft and see what could be done about getting ashore. After that there was silence between us; I think we both realised that by then the position would be hopeless—that, in fact, we were doomed.

He extended his hand, which I gripped firmly; then above the roar of the wind and the surf I heard the unmistakable rattling of chain cables flying over the whelps of the windlass. "Why, the anchor must still be holding; there's nothing else could drag the cables out like that," I cried.

"Exactly," Jack confirmed. "As we hadn't paid out more chain she's taking it out herself, though how she's getting it over the windlass I don't know. As a matter of fact, a lot of it has run out already—I've heard it—and it must have been lying in bights on the bottom till she drifted astern and took up the slack."

We went out on deck and Jack lowered the



riding-light from the fore-stay. Luckily it was burning at that moment ; for earlier in the evening it had been blown out and relit. We went along to the vicinity of the windlass, keeping well clear of the leaping chains. The first thing we noticed was that both springs had parted ; their frayed ends were lying near the towing-posts. Then we looked at the windlass, and the nature of the damage became apparent. The pawls had been smashed, and with no check on them the barrels were revolving madly and the cables were free to run out. Presently they stopped running ; doubtless they were again lying slack on the bottom but would not remain slack for long.

The *Kathleen*, like many vessels of her class, had no chain-locker below ; instead, the cables were stowed in troughs on the deck between the windlass and the foremast. We looked into the troughs and found they were nearly empty, and we wondered how the ends of the cable were secured, for we sincerely hoped they *were* secured ; if not, God help us ! Again the chains went rattling out of the troughs, over the windlass and into the sea, and the base of the foremast came into view. The port cable had been passed round it and brought out into the starboard trough ; and there the two cable-ends lay, shackled together. Evidently that was the regular custom, for iron whelps had been fitted to the mast to prevent the chain sawing into the wood ; and it seemed to be a sound custom, too. It meant that the mast would have to be

pulled out before the last of the chains went. "That's all right," I cried.

"Is it?" Jack yelled back at me. "Look at the pin!"

I looked at the pin of the shackle which held the two end links of the cables together and nearly froze with horror. I have no idea when that shackle had last been inspected, but it was almost rusted through—indeed the pin was little more than a thread of rust. With the slightest strain it would snap, the two end links would fly apart, run out over the useless windlass and through the hawse-pipes, and drop into the sea. After that no earthly power could prevent the *Kathleen* from driving swiftly on to the rocks.

We shook off the frozen horror and came to our senses with a celerity that the old man himself could hardly have bettered. "That awning chain!" we cried simultaneously.

Only the day before, the captain had decided that he would not be using the awning in Terceira, so we had dismantled the stanchions which stretched it from the mizzen boom over the after-deck, and unrove the chains to which it was tied when spread. "I'll get one of them; I know where I stowed them," Jack cried.

He handed me the riding-light and dashed toward the forepeak hatch, just abaft the windlass; and truly there was need for swiftness, for only two or three lengths of the chain cables remained in the bottom of the troughs. "I'll go down," Jack said.



We tore off the hatch-cover, and I shone the light down into the forepeak while Jack descended. He was as good as his word ; for in less than half a minute he had handed me a bundle of small chain and was clambering back to the deck. The strain was coming on the windlass again ; very soon the cables would be moving and we would be unable to handle them. Jack whipped out his sheath-knife and cut the neat rope-yarn stops he had put on the bundle before stowing it away. We noted that the end links of the cables were special ones, larger than the others, and we filled them with small chain, turn after turn, as we lashed them together. When we could get in no more turns, we extended the lashing to the other links. It was no time for fumbling, for fingers-all-thumbs sort of business ; we had pulled ourselves together and were working deftly and deliberately.

We finished the job, straightened our backs, and stood looking down with satisfaction at our handiwork. The lengths of chains in the troughs began to rustle, then away they went, leaping and rattling, while the windlass barrels revolved madly. At last the troughs were empty save for the two cables leading straight from the base of the mast to the rocking windlass, and soon they tightened with a terrific jar. Now the strain came on our lashing with a snap, and it held—and we became aware that the captain had joined us.

For a time he stood there, silent and taking everything in—the broken windlass, the parted

springs, and the empty troughs. He took the riding-light and shone it on the rusty shackle and on our lashing; then he pressed trembling hands to his brow. When he spoke his voice was husky and broken with emotion. "Thanks, boys," he blurted out. "I shall never forget this. Never!"

He turned abruptly and staggered aft, while Jack and I stood grinning at each other in a shame-faced sort of way. "Old boy, I believe he has just discovered that we are chums," Jack said at last. "Shocking! The second officer chummy with an A.B. in the forecastle! Why, it's the negation of all discipline and decency!"

"I thought he would have been annoyed with me for not reporting to him at once," I said.

"Well, of course, that's the first thing you should have done," Jack admitted, "but he had it well rubbed in that we were—er—somewhat pressed for time."

## VII.

With the deafening thunder of the waves breaking at the base of the cliffs, and the blinding sheet of tortured white surf under the stern looking in fact much closer than it actually was, we got no more sleep that night. At times we could actually see the cliffs through the spray, and when we soared up on to the crest of a great comber it almost looked as if the *Kathleen* might topple over and fall against their bases.



Daylight took a long time to come in that morning, and when it did it revealed a group of blue-lipped, red-eyed, dripping and suffering humanity, sheltering in couples round the deck, frightened to go below. With the growing light the cliffs seemed farther away; though it was obvious that we had dragged much nearer to the shore before the chains had run out and brought her up; indeed she was certainly dragging fast when Jack and I had put the deep-sea lead over. We tried to estimate the distance from the stern to the breakers. The captain made it about a quarter of a mile, and also expressed an emphatic opinion that no wind that ever blew could shift the barquentine with a hundred and twenty fathoms of cable out on each anchor. I was glad to accept this assurance; there was nothing else I could do about it, anyhow.

I went along to my room to change into dry clothes, for I was soaked to the skin, and a few minutes later the steward, with Claude at his heels, came round from the galley with a mug of steaming hot coffee and a couple of biscuits well coated with jam. "What have *you* been up to, mister?" he demanded.

"*Me?*" I retorted. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I just heard the old man tell the mate that but for you and Boag there would have been none of us left alive to drink coffee."

Presently some men, leaning against the weight of the wind, came staggering along the top of the cliffs and stood looking across the water at us.

We noticed that the spray was reaching almost up to them. Pieces of driftwood were tossing about wildly in the surf, and occasionally wicked-looking slabs of rock were uncovered. The mate, who had joined me, shuddered. "We wouldn't have lasted very long if we had got into that," he said.

It was true. The end, if inevitable, would have been mercifully swift; but neither Jack nor I were particularly keen on having our young lives ended in that, or any other way, just then.

That evening the wind went round to the northwest and we were again in sheltered water. Next morning, shortly after dawn, there came, borne on the land wind, sounds which made my blood run cold; indeed the memory of those sounds is about the most enduring one that I carried away from Terceira. It seemed to us that there must be a terrible massacre going on ashore there, and that the victims must be undergoing fiendish tortures. The shrieking went on at intervals all day, and it was not until the ship-chandler came off next morning that I learned it was caused by carts drawn by oxen, carts creaking on solid wooden wheels with axles which had never known either oil or grease.

The new position to which we had dragged pleased some people. The boatmen coming off for our cargo did not even have to set their sails; from their landing beach they had a comparatively short pull with their oars, and with the offshore wind the water was as sheltered as that in an enclosed dock. The rate of discharging was accelerated considerably, to



the captain's satisfaction, for he had endured enough of Terceira and its gales. One morning he appeared on deck in what Jack called his "Sunday-go-to-meeting" suit, and we discovered that he was actually going on shore. With him was John carrying a canvas bag which contained all the parts of the broken windlass pawls. It appeared that there was a blacksmith in the town who could make new ones.

They pushed off in one of the boats, standing on top of the coal, and the captain made the boatmen pull round the bows so that he could examine the kedge anchor that was acting as a hawse-pipe. Before the boat was pulled away he shouted to the mate that it was all right. When they returned in the evening John brought off two large pine-apples. It was the first time his feet had touched foreign soil.

We certainly made progress with the cargo while the sun shone, but it did not shine long. One morning another warning note came off from the meteorological office, and the hurricane signs that by then we knew so well appeared again in the sky. Off the little beach a bottleneck—in the true sense of that much overworked word—had been created. The fishing-boats were running up on it as soon as they could be hauled clear, and half a dozen of them were hanging off awaiting their turn. The captain came on deck, took one look at the surf, which was again piling up on the cliffs, and made a decision. "All hands abandon ship!"

he shouted. "Get the longboat swung out—and be quick about it!"

We turned the longboat right side up and raised her off the hatch by means of tackles from the fore and main masts; then swung her out over the side. Soon she was waterborne, rising almost up to the level of the rail at one moment, falling to the turn of the bilge the next. We were going on shore just as we stood, but I managed to dodge into my room and put my watch and my toothbrush into my pocket. Jack did the same, and so did the mate.

We got down into the boat and settled in our places on the thwarts. There were five oars, and I was going to pull stroke, with Jansen, Paddy and Mathews behind my back, and Jack at the bow oar. The mate was in the stern-sheets with the tiller in his hand, and the boy, John, crouched on the bottom-boards. We were waiting for the captain, who had gone down to the cabin, presumably to get the ship's papers; but it was the steward's head that appeared at the rail. "Here, mister," he shouted to the mate, "haven't you forgotten something?"

He climbed on to the topgallant rail and we saw that he had Claude in his arms. The steward beckoned to me—I suppose he thought I was Claude's next-best friend—and I stood up and took the cat in my arms. The steward dropped into the boat and as soon as he sat down on a thwart Claude hopped on to his knee.



The captain came along with the papers, wrapped in oilskin, under his coat, and the chronometer in his hand. This was certainly necessary, for a chronometer is a delicate instrument which requires regular winding, so could not be left on board. The old man stood on the rail holding on to a main shroud with one hand and grasping the leather strap round the chronometer box with the other. Jack was standing in the bow watching his chance; the boat surged upwards almost to the captain's feet, and Jack grabbed the box and held it firmly against his body. The boat dropped and Jack subsided on to his thwart with the chronometer between his knees. The old man worked his way aft and, watching his chance, dropped heavily into the stern-sheets. The chronometer was passed from hand to hand until it reached the mate, who nursed it while the captain took over the tiller. "Push off, Boag," he cried.

Early in the voyage it had dawned on me that there was far more in the captain than met the eye, and gradually I got the impression that he was really a first-class seaman; now he proceeded to give a magnificent demonstration of the art of handling a rowing-boat in a rough sea. He did not head directly for the beach, for that would have brought the boat broadside on to wind and sea; instead, he kept the wind about four points on the starboard bow, so that by the parallelogram of forces—the forces being the wind and the speed we were able to maintain with the oars—we pro-

gressed steadily toward our objective. I am afraid that I did not pull a very sure stroke, for with the motion of the boat I was sliding about on the thwart, the heft of the oar felt too thick for my grip, and the oar was too long and too heavy.

In spite of it all we were getting on, and the sound of the surf scouring out the pebbles on the beach sounded louder and louder. I glanced over my shoulder and decided we had reached to within a hundred yards of it, when for the first time the old man spoke. "Pull port, back water starboard," he shouted.

He was turning the boat head to wind with the intention of taking her in to the beach stern first. For most of the time we rested on our oars, only using them as the captain directed to keep the boat head on to the hard running waves while the wind blew her toward the beach. With my back now turned seaward, I was able to have a look at the shore. Just beyond the beach, which was completely covered with large pebbles, there was a sort of sea wall with a building looking over it, which we afterwards discovered was the Custom House. There were spectators on the beach, most of whom looked like fishermen, though among them were men in uniform, and one tall, very handsome woman, whose black hair was blowing about in complete confusion.

A moment later we were in the breakers, amid a great welter of surging, seething foam. With my eyes full of spray and the great roar of the pound-



ing waves singing in my ears I felt confused, and the oar was nearly torn from my hands. The boat rushed in at a dizzy speed, urged on by an incoming wave which lifted it high, then dropped it with a crash on the pebbles. As it rose again the bow threatened to swing round, and Jack rose to his feet with the intention of resting the blade of his oar on the shingle and with it keeping the boat straight. Before he had got his balance another sea rushed at the boat, caught it on the bluff of the bow, and heeled it over with such violence as to throw us, helpless, on to the lee gunwale. Jack was flung into the sea; and I remember feeling thankful that he was a good swimmer and had left the ship barefooted. I caught a glimpse of him in the surf, hanging on to his oar.

As we struggled to get to windward and right the boat I became aware of dark faces on both sides. Some Terceirans had entered the water and, waist deep, were trying to pull the boat ashore. With quick readiness of mind the captain unshipped the rudder just before the stern thudded on the beach. She rose again on the next sea, which threw her farther up on the beach; some twenty men were now dragging at her, and eventually we dropped over the stern and landed almost dry shod.

My first care was to look round for Jack. Looking very much ashamed of himself, he was standing between the woman and a man in uniform who turned out to be her husband. She was mothering Jack; feeling, almost caressing, his sodden garments

and speaking a few words in halting English. Then she spoke to her husband, who nodded as if in agreement, and pointed to the Custom House. He was, in fact, the head of the Customs; and they took hold of Jack's arms and started to lead him away. He broke away from them, however, to place his oar carefully in the boat, and help us to drag her higher up on the beach. Then the friendly fishermen took over that job, and we were all taken to the Custom House, where, of course, we had nothing to declare except one chronometer, which the captain was permitted to retain.

I fancy I would have felt somewhat happier, even elated, had I known then what I learned later: that the nine men, and a cat, who toiled painfully up that pebbly slope had just succeeded where famous men had failed. Centuries before, Raleigh and Drake had tried to land on that strip of beach and had been repulsed by the Spaniards who then held the island. What a thrill we would have had if we had only known that we were on such historic ground!

In the Custom House we were given hot coffee, and the captain went off to see what could be done about billeting. It appeared that accommodation in Angra do Heroismo was as difficult to obtain as rooms in a fashionable seaside resort in England in August. We did not know then that the town we had landed near had such a high-sounding name; in fact we did not know it had a name at all, for we never heard it while we were on the



island. I would go further and say that I did not know it till over forty years had passed; then in October 1943 Jack and I, in retirement in Strathspey, read in our newspapers that a British force had landed on Terceira and established a base for Coastal Command of the R.A.F. Terceira! what memories the name recalled! And events moved swiftly. Within a month of the establishment of the base leased to us by our allies, the Portuguese, a German U-boat had been sent to the bottom by Coastal Command. History on sleepy Terceira! Raleigh and Drake, and the R.A.F. . . . a goodly company.

Jack was taken away by the lady of the Custom House to change into dry clothing, and when he returned he was a weird sight. The old Customs uniform jacket, stripped of badges, which he had been given, was two sizes too big for him, and the brown corduroy trousers were about six inches short. The fact that he was still barefooted did not seem to matter much in Terceira, where many men were in the same condition, but to protect his feet against the stony ground he had been given a pair of sandals with wooden soles.

## VIII.

The captain returned to lead us to the billets he had found. They had only one merit—they were close to the beach, and were in what was by

courtesy called a hotel, a large one-storeyed building, all whitewash and green venetian blinds. We were assured that we were very lucky to get them, for it was either that or sleeping on the beach. Only the captain and the mate had beds, but what they were like I do not know, for I never saw them. By virtue of my rank I had the next best accommodation—the table in the large billiard-room—while the rest camped on straw mattresses on the stone floor. Fortunately we were given blankets, for the weather at night was decidedly chilly. My billiard table was a continental one on which only cannons were scored, as I discovered the first time I undressed and tried to put my socks in one of the pockets. There were none.

The captain intended to maintain strict discipline and was glad we were all under one roof. It was not as if we had lost our ship; she was still in being and we were still on her articles. He called us together and explained what he intended the routine to be. Through the day we were free to do much as we liked, except that we must remain within a mile of the beach ready for a call. After dark we had to take turns to watch the ship from the shore with orders to report to the captain if she broke adrift. He wanted to be in at the death, so to speak, and in a position to give the authorities the exact time of her being wrecked. It was like an anchor watch, only there was, of course, no question of keeping the riding-lights burning, and no chance of collision as she was so close inshore.



The land had one advantage—it was steady to walk on ; but we had only one meal in the hotel—lunch, consisting of bean soup, half-raw fish, and black bread which gave us heartburn—before we were longing to get back to the ship, longing for our storm-tossed barquentine, our comfortable bunks, and, above all, the excellent food we got on board. Jack and I decided to go for a stroll, and set off in the direction of the town.

At first there were only a few small houses ; then we came to a square well filled with trees. In spite of our shabby attire we were thinking of going into a restaurant for a cup of coffee when we remembered we had no money. This also handicapped us when we came to the next place of interest—a fruit market, from the dimness of which warm heavy-scented air was wafted through a great doorway. A girl came out of a shop and presented us with an orange apiece ; she addressed a few kindly words to us, and I was sorry we could not understand her. I made up my mind to ask the old man for a small advance of pay. We wandered on through the narrow cobbled streets, feeling that we were never very far from the sea ; and occasionally we would get sudden, unexpected glimpses of the stormy Atlantic. Eventually we came on to the water-front again. “ Here’s our hotel,” I said.

“ Sounds very grand,” said Jack. “ I wonder if they’ll give us anything decent for supper.”

At eight o’clock I went along to keep the first watch. Earlier, the mate and I had found a cleft,

a sort of a cave, a little way down the cliffs, from which we could watch the ship and have some protection against the biting wind and occasional clouds of spray. There was a half-moon and I could see the *Kathleen*, well below me and a bit to the right. In spite of her shortened stumpy masts she stood out quite distinctly against a background of ragged clouds flying shoreward at a speed that almost made me giddy. She was never still; up would go her bows till they seemed to be lifting to the sky, and I trembled to think of the strain on the cables; a few seconds later she would be almost hidden in a hollow. As I watched her I realised what she meant to me; almost everything I possessed was in her, and if we lost her I lost the job I had secured with such difficulty and which, in spite of its seeming insignificance, I had come to love.

It was the first time I had kept a watch from the shore, and after a little it began to get on my nerves. From my eyrie on the cliffs I could trace the line of surf below me till it melted into darkness on both sides; but that, and the tortured barquentine, was all the sea had to show. Already I was longing for the end of my watch. I felt desperately lonely, and craved for human companionship; then, as if by a miracle, I got it. I heard a woman's voice—a woman's voice on that bleak cliff face! I was badly startled, as if I had seen a ghost, and put it down to an hallucination. Then I heard the voice again and was aware of a whiff of a



fragrant perfume. Loose hair brushed against my face ; the speaker was in the cleft beside me. It was the woman from the Custom House, and a moment later she was joined by her husband. And the reason for them being there : they had seen the mate and me examining the cleft and realised why ; and, incredible though it may seem, that couple had come along to the top of the cliffs that wild, blustering night to add to their store of English words !

After that the watch passed all too quickly. They were charming people, though at times they taxed my powers of explanation. For instance, the husband occasionally played a game on my bed in the hotel, and wanted to know what relation a cannon at billiards bore to a big gun ; while the lady's questions were mostly about articles of clothing ! But I was really sorry when my watch told me it was time to go up to the hotel and call my relief, and I had to tell my visitors that they could do no good by waiting ; for my relief was Jansen, and poor though my qualifications as a teacher of the English language might have been, he had none whatever. However, I cheered them with the information that the gentleman who fell out of the boat while we were landing would be on duty the following evening and I would come with him.

I got back to the billiard-room, roused out Jansen, and lent him my watch. I saw him off on his way to the cliffs, then returned to find a minor commotion

raging. Our cat was missing, and had been for a couple of hours. He had been curled up on the floor alongside the steward when I had gone out to keep my watch; now he could not be found. Occasionally during the night I was wakened by what sounded like pitched battle between two army corps of cats, but in the morning Claude was still missing.

The first news of him came from one of the gendarmes who had been sent to us because he was supposed to be able to speak English, though his eloquence in that language was slight compared with the violence of his gesticulations. The British cat that landed from the boat was an anarchist, he said; a bandit, a murderer . . . a *cannibal*! He had terrorised every male cat in the vicinity—a swift worker, our Claude—and enticed away every female one. He must be brought under control at once, otherwise he would be shot. "*Si, si, señor, me savez,*" said the steward, to whom this speech had been addressed, "but where is he?"

That was the problem. Jansen returned from a walk just before what was described as lunch, and reported having seen Claude sitting on a doorstep somewhere near the square. He had tried to get hold of him; but the cat had arched his back, spat, and ran off. "He would, the darned snob," the steward said bitterly.

After lunch the steward and I went round with Jansen to the house where Claude had been seen, but there was no sign of him. The steward and I



then did a sort of patrol of the town, but in vain. We never saw Claude again all the time we were ashore in Terceira.

The next member of the ship's company to go missing was Paddy. It was the first breach of discipline since we landed, and the captain swore he would fine the Irishman two days' pay for every day he was absent without leave. It was next day before we had news of him ; then John and Mathews reported having seen him looking out of a barred window in the calaboose. I told the captain and he sent me along to investigate. The jail was a tall grey building on the outskirts of the town, and I found Paddy staring out between the bars of a window in a cell on the ground floor.

Paddy was not feeling very well. He admitted that he had been looking on the *vino* when it was red, and had a vile headache. He suggested that he had been misled. "The stuff looked as harmless as red ink and as mild as milk," he said, "but sure it had a kick in it worse than the wildest potheen ye would be buyin' in a Dublin shebeen, and, mind ye, *that's* the ferocious stuff."

His explanation of how he came to be arrested was delightfully naïve. A man had invited him into a café and given him a drink ; then another man had come in playing a banjo and singing a rotten Portuguese song. "Then I borrowed the banjo and was givin' them wan or two staves of 'The Wearin' o' the Green,' when two of their peelers pulled me in."

I entered the jail and found the "peeler," who could speak English; and *his* explanation was slightly different. The "banjo" was a mandolin, and Paddy had "borrowed" it by snatching it out of the player's hands and threatening to punch his nose if he wasn't pleased. As for Paddy's singing . . . The gendarme crossed himself piously and swore he had never heard anything like it. They had to arrest the singer for his own protection, but it had taken four of them, instead of the two mentioned by Paddy, to do it. I came out of the jail and said good-bye to Paddy through the bars—and it would have taken a Highland seer with an extraordinary gift of second sight to have forecast that in less than twenty-four hours our positions would be reversed—that I would be behind the bars and Paddy speaking to me from the street. When I told the captain he said that a longer spell in the calaboose would do the erring mariner no harm. "I'll pay his fine this evening, and they'll let him out in the morning," he said.

Paddy returned bright and early next day, but the captain decided to leave him out of our next enterprise, which was to go off in the boat and pull round the ship. With the aid of a borrowed telescope the old man could get a good view of her from our post on the cliffs, but he could not see what he most wanted to see, for the bows were constantly pointing seaward. It would be high water just after nine o'clock, so all hands left the hotel immediately after breakfast. There must



have been a spring tide, for the water was well up on the beach, and we managed to drag the boat over the shingle and get her afloat. The wind had veered a few points, so the surf was not so dangerous. We got into the boat ; the steward, John and Paddy pushed her off, and we pulled seawards.

The wind had certainly eased a bit, but there was still a heavy swell running when we reached the *Kathleen*. She was pitching heavily, with the sea rising up to the level of her scupper holes, then falling till we could see most of her copper sheathing. When I had first seen her in the dock at Cardiff I had looked at her without enthusiasm ; she was just a rung in the ladder of my profession and I was lucky to have been appointed to her. Now, after a couple of months in her, my feelings were different. She was an insignificant little ship, a mean little ship as ships go, a ship built of soft wood and unlikely to last much more than ten years, if that—but I discovered while we were lying off her in the boat that I not only admired her, but had learned to love her, brave little vessel that she was.

She was not dishevelled, for we had braced up the yards that remained aloft, and hauled taut every rope before we left her ; she was just desperately lonely, and pathetic in her loneliness. There she was, completely deserted and depending for her life on two chains attached to anchors lying on the sea-bed two hundred yards away. How I longed to go aboard her for a few minutes, if only

to get a spare pair of socks and to have a look at my mother's portrait hanging at the head of my bunk! We might have boarded her, though with considerable difficulty; but it was the bows the captain wanted to see, so we pulled the boat forward. The kedge anchor triced up under the starboard cable was still in its place and the port hawse-pipe was intact, though both chains were grinding hard when the bow was flung upward. Satisfied, the captain ordered us to give way, and we headed back for the beach.

Again we turned the boat's head to wind and sea and backed in. There was no woman standing on the beach this time, and there were no fishermen to welcome us; instead there were half a dozen gendarmes armed with rifles. The steward, Paddy and John, having taken off their boots and stockings, waded into the sea, and Jack jumped in beside them. Aided by the surge of a wave, they hauled the boat a few yards over the shingle and we all got out. Our English-speaking policeman was not there, unfortunately, but the captain managed, by signs, to ask the gendarmes to help us pull the boat up beyond high-water mark. They did—then they arrested us; every man who had been out in the boat had a policeman gripping an arm and urging him to move up toward the road.

Our indignant captain demanded an explanation from the sergeant, who seemed to be in charge, but the only reply he got was a shrug of the shoulders. The captain repeated his demand, this time with



more heat, and the sergeant drew a heavy revolver from the holster at his belt while his men threatened us with their rifle butts. Jack, Mathews, and I— young and hot-blooded—would fain have put up a fight, but the captain checked us. "We'd better go quietly; I'll fix them later on," he said.

## IX.

Again we toiled up the pebbly slope and reached the road. Holding our heads high we marched towards the town, with the police on both sides of us. The captain and the mate marched at the head of the little column of files; I followed with the steward who, although he had not been arrested, walked with us; Paddy and John, who had not been arrested either, brought up the rear. Most of the spectators we passed gave us looks expressing sympathy, though one or two young men of the hooligan type jeered at the sight of Britons being humiliated in such a way. The steward's eyes wandered from side to side and I could easily guess the reason. We entered the town and just before we reached the jail the captain turned round to the steward. "Nip along and find the ship-chandler," he said. "Tell him to come along to the jail at once. If he is the vice-consul, he ought to be able to clear up this mess."

The steward dashed off, and a couple of minutes later we entered the calaboose and were received

Our captain had interrupted the futile argument with a broadside which shook the room and lifted the two officials right out of their chairs. If we were kept in that jail another half-hour, he thundered, the whole British Navy would eventually appear off Terceira and blast the island right out of the sea. A feeble attempt to justify his action by the Commandant had brought an even fiercer broadside from our old man; and a further reference to the Royal Navy had brought surrender and profuse apologies. When the ship-chandler left, a bottle of really good wine had been brought in, and peace reigned. The incident closed, and I had added to my experiences that of having been in prison. After lunch, since nothing seemed likely to happen to the ship, I asked the captain's permission to go, with Jack, for a long country walk. "Certainly, away you go," the old man said. "You'll be quite safe; I don't think they'll try to put another British sailor in the calaboose for a long time to come."

We went off between stone walls, dodging dogs, chickens, and children. Almost immediately we met a pair of oxen dragging one of the creaking carts, and the excruciating sounds it made when at close quarters set our teeth on edge. The oxen were led by a bit of a dandy—a young man in a well-fitting dark coat, striped trousers, stiff white collar with tie, and check cap—but minus footwear. By the colour of his face he might have been digging coal, but we discovered that the dirt was due to dust which rose from the black volcanic soil.



In one field the wheat had ripened ; in another maize was growing by the side of the road, and we helped ourselves to some cobs in the hope that the steward would be able to cook them for us in the hotel kitchen. So backward were they in Terceira that they still threshed the wheat by dragging heavy pieces of timber over it, and winnowed it by tossing it up in the wind. This we learned from a nice-looking schoolboy, with a satchel of books on his back, who came out of a field and talked to us in quite good English. He asked if we were from the big ship in the bay—the big ship!—and seemed reluctant to leave us when we came to a lane leading up to his home. We said we wanted to climb one of the nearer hills and he set us on our way, which led through another narrow lane with thick hedges on both sides. Up till then we had enjoyed the tramp thoroughly, but now it was not quite so interesting, for the hedges were so dense we could hardly see through them. We trudged on through thick black dust, hoping we would soon come into open ground.

Suddenly, out of a cloud of dust ahead, there emerged the figures of a man and a large bull, which was pawing the ground furiously. The man was trying to control it in a way that was new to me : he had a long stick with a hook in the end of it, something like a boat-hook, and the hook had been inserted through the ring in the bull's nose. At the sight, or smell, of us the bull went mad ; and in the struggle that followed, the hook

came away from the ring and the bull was free ! The man promptly took to his heels and passed us at the rate of knots on his way down the lane. He must have realised that we did not speak Portuguese, though why he should warn us in French as he bolted I don't know. "*Sauve qui peut ! sauve ui peut !*" he yelled.

"Jack," I cried, "that brute is out of control ; it's time we weren't here."

We turned and made off at full speed. In those days I was clipper-built and could do the hundred yards in but little over level time, but my heavy leather sea-boots made running difficult, and the lane under its thick covering of dust was rough and stony. Jack, on the other hand, had to stop occasionally to retrieve a sandal. One of them was continually coming off and he had to pick it up as it did not belong to him ; and, moreover, some of the stones were sharp, with cutting edges. It was very awkward, but the furious snorting of the bull, which was certainly gaining, hurried us on.

Suddenly I saw the Terceiran in front of us stoop down by the side of the hedge on the starboard side of the lane and then dive headlong into it. As I got near him I saw that there was a slight gap through which he was desperately wriggling. I indicated the gap to Jack ; then I, also, dived into it and brought up sharply against the Terceiran's boots. He almost filled the gap ; for he was trying to fight his way into a close thicket of maize stalks on the other side of the hedge. "Can't you



get a move on?" cried Jack, whose head was now close to *my* boots. "I can feel the brute's breath!"

I smote the Terceiran hard on the rump, but I fancy it was a furious bellow from the bull that brought the supreme effort. Anyhow, he got right into the maize and I wriggled after him leaving the gap clear; and just in time! The bull's horns tore into the hedge a few seconds after Jack had got his legs clear of the lane. He crawled after me and we lay in the maize, trying to recover our wits, and our breath, and listening to the bull snorting and bellowing on the other side of the hedge. "Old man, I've had quite enough of the blessings of the land," Jack said at last. "This morning I was arrested and clapped into jail, then told I was lucky to be released; this afternoon I was chased by a mad bull, and just missed being gored to death. The sooner we get back aboard the ship the better. Give me a tops'l yard in a gale of wind—anywhere where I'll be *safe*!"

The following day we did go back aboard; after the old man had paid the hotel bill and been granted formal permission from the Port Commandant. Some fishermen who had been hanging about the beach helped us to launch the boat and gave us an encouraging cheer. All of us were delighted except the steward, who had never ceased to hope that he would find Claude.

## X.

After that all hands became very sick and distrustful of Terceira Bay, and fears of yet another hurricane gave extra strength to the hands digging out the coal. Every morning when we turned out we scanned the sky for the now well-known gale signs and prayed we should not find them. The discharging was interrupted for a few days while we took in stone ballast, then resumed. At last the mate declared, as the hatch was being covered at the end of a day's work, that two more boats would take all the coal that was left. How we longed for morning, and hoped it would be a calm one! If the first boat came off bright and early we should finish the coal before breakfast, and spend the rest of the day sending up the topmasts and bending sail.

When the steward called me at half-past five, as usual, he announced that two boats were coming out; indeed one of them was fairly close. I had finished my coffee and dressed when the steward again darkened my doorway, and spoke in a voice that was vibrant with triumph and joy. "The bold hero has returned!" he cried.

I went out on deck. Perched high on the bow of the nearest boat was "the bold hero." He did not wait till the boat came alongside; when she was still a yard off he jumped from her bow and landed on our topgallant rail. From there he



dropped to the deck, gave me a mew of recognition, then, with long tail standing up as stiff as a poker, he followed the delighted steward to the galley. "Claude, you are one very wicked cat," the steward said in mock reproof. "You ought to be logged as a deserter."

"*Miau-au-au*," went Claude. "*Miau!*"

"All right, all right," the steward answered hastily. "I'll give you some nice porridge and condensed milk."

At the supper table that evening the captain hinted darkly that we should probably have trouble with ice in the Gulf of St Lawrence when we eventually got there. That did not worry me much—then; all I wanted was to get away from that hateful anchorage. There was much to be done before that would be possible; there must be days of hard work aloft; then most laborious of all, we should have to heave in two hundred and forty fathoms of chain cable, and break out two anchors, with a partially repaired windlass.

Jack maintained, I think with justice, that the proper place for the *Kathleen's* windlass was in a museum. It was driven by two long levers set athwartships, with crossbars at their outer ends. We pumped those levers up and down; when the crossbar, with which we moved the lever, was right up it came level with a man's head, when it was down it reached close to the deck. The groups that manned the bars faced each other, and when one bar was up the other was down. The lower

ends of the levers were fitted with rockers which engaged gear wheels on the wooden barrels of the windlass and the up-and-down pumping motion became a rotary one, by which the cable was slowly hove-in. Slowly! With it we could heave in chain at the rate of something like fifteen fathoms an hour!

It was this primitive machine that we manned one morning long before dawn, and at which we toiled all day—up and down, up and down. I had never been shipmates with such a windlass—we had always weighed the anchor by tramping round a capstan on the fore-castle-head—and I wondered if chanties, which were great aids to labour and, indeed, were only used as such, could be sung with it. Mathews, who had been longer in the *Kathleen* than anyone else, said they had always sung them when heaving up the anchor, and being Welsh led off with one. He sang “Shen-andoah,” and even the old man, himself, occasionally helped to swell the lovely, haunting chorus. At intervals throughout the day we sang till we were nearly hoarse. Up and down, up and down, with hands that became blistered, and straining pains in necks and backs; up and down, till sunset, when only thirty fathoms of cable was left out on each anchor.

There was some delay next morning; for during the night, which was calm, the ship, swinging to the tides, had put a round turn in the cables. This



had to be cleared by lashing them together, unshackling one at the thirty-fathom shackle and dipping it round the other; then up and down again till the starboard cable was hove short. For a time the anchor refused to leave the bed in which it had lain so long; then, just as the captain was thinking of setting some sail to break it out, it came a-weigh. We secured it, and when we went to our belated mid-day meal after two o'clock, we were riding to the port anchor and only fifteen fathoms of cable.

We came out on deck for the final struggle. With the port cable short some sails were loosed, and when the anchor came a-weigh they were sheeted home. The *Kathleen* gathered way and was headed for the south-west corner of the island and the broad Atlantic. The sun, slanting in from the westward, was gilding the dark mountain of Santa Barbara, and the whole island looked lovely and peaceful. Sail after sail was piled on till the *Kathleen*, leaning over to the thrust of the southeasterly breeze, had every stitch of canvas set. I stood on deck and watched those menacing cliffs gliding astern; and though we were leaving that bay of evil memory I could not help feeling just a little sad. For we were departing from Terceira unregarded, unsaluted, and unnoticed. So I thought—but I was wrong.

On the lower topsail-yard Jack was making up a gasket; and he paused in his work, caught my



eye, and pointed out on the starboard quarter to where the little beach on which we had landed was just about to be shut out from our view by the cliffs on which had been our eyrie. Just behind it I could see something white fluttering in the wind. Someone on the roof of the Custom House was waving a large sheet.



## THE LUCK OF THE *JOHN LOCKETT*.

### I.

FROM the time we left Terceira till the day we got back to Swansea, the *Kathleen's* voyage can, I think, with justice be described as eventful. We had head winds, many of gale force, all the way across the Atlantic, resulting in a weary passage during which we endured many hardships and had several narrow escapes. Owing to an error in navigation, due partly to the mate not having his sextant with him, we actually touched Sable Island—the graveyard of the Atlantic—but providentially got clear. We ran short of water, but were saved by a heavy snowstorm on the Banks of Newfoundland, when I learned that though you may fill a tank with snow, and press it well down, you will only have a few inches of water in the bottom of the tank when the snow melts. We could not get into our first port for ice, and were ordered to go round to our home port, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; and there we were frozen in for three months. Then our luck turned with a vengeance.

With the help of the powerful ice-breaker *Stanley* we escaped from Charlottetown while it was still

ice-bound. We passed through the narrow Gut of Canso under sail, and emerged from the eastern end of it into a north-west gale. Favoured by that we stormed our way across the Western Ocean right into Swansea in less than ten days; and if that is not a record passage from Cape Breton for a sailing vessel it cannot be very far off it—and, incidentally, it showed what the captain of the *Kathleen* could do when he really got down to it. Having thus packed into a matter of seven or eight months more adventure and experience than many windjammer seamen get in the course of a decade, I thought I would have a holiday.

I said good-bye to the old *Kathleen* with regret, and still hold her, and those who sailed in her, in affectionate remembrance. She vanished from my ken long ago and has certainly been broken up, for those soft-wood vessels rarely lasted very long. Then, with one exception, those who were my shipmates on that voyage went out of my life the day I left her, and I never expected anything else, for usually the last contact was at the shipping office on the day the ship paid off. With Jack Boag it was, of course, different. We were life-long friends, and corresponded regularly; and I will go outside the scope of this story for a moment to tell of our next meeting, nearly five years later.

By that time I had acquired an extra-master's certificate, put in a spell as an officer in mail and passenger liners on the North Atlantic, and settled down to do some teaching in a navigation school



where I could read up some special subjects in my spare time. To the school came Jack to study for his master's certificate, and he came at the right time for me; for I was about to get married and I wanted him to be my best man. He agreed readily. "It'll mean a new mainsail coat and gaff topsail hat," he said, "but I'm just off a fifteen months' voyage with a good pay-day, so expense won't stand in the way."

Needless to say I was delighted, and when the day came, Jack, in his new frock coat and silk hat, was far from being the least distinguished-looking figure at the wedding ceremony.

But to my tale: I will go back to the days that followed after I left the *Kathleen*. I was living in Aberdeen, and one morning I decided to have a busman's holiday; I went for a stroll round the docks. I did not expect to see anything very interesting; there would be the usual colliers, a few coasting schooners, and perhaps a tramp steamer in from the Black Sea with wheat, as well as the local passenger steamers that ran to London, Newcastle, Orkney, and Shetland. But my first glance along the harbour showed that there was a fair-sized sailing-ship lying near the eastern end. One could never mistake a sailing-ship, because her masts towered high above everything.

I strolled on, but I could not get a clear view of the ship because of one or two vessels lying at the buoys in the middle of the dock. When I cleared them a local collier, bound to Sunderland

for another load of coal, steamed past, and by the time she got out of the way, and the smoke trailing behind her had cleared, I had almost reached the dock gates. Then I stopped, brought up all-standing by the sheer beauty of the iron barque lying on the opposite side of the dock. I suppose I must have been staring with my mouth wide open, for one of the uniformed dock officials—a renegade from blue water—noticed me and spoke. "Aye, a bonnie shippie!" he said.

"She is," I agreed readily; "where is she from?"

"The West Coast, wi' saltpetre," he answered.

The West Coast! By that time, toward the end of the last century, the phrase West Coast, as used by deep-sea sailormen, no longer meant the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast, the Bight of Benin, or the Coast of Dead Ned; its geographical location had changed to another hemisphere; it referred to the West Coast of South America, and more particularly to the nitrate, guano, and copper ore ports of Chili.

The collier passed out of the lock, and the gates closed behind her, so I crossed to the other side to have a closer look at the barque. I reached her port quarter and read her name and port of registry on the counter: *John Lockett*, Liverpool.

I stood on the quay and feasted my eyes on her. No pleasure yacht ever had a more perfect sheer as expressed by the line of her rail. The two superstructures that rose from it—the poop and the forecastle-head—were low enough to remove



any appearance of clumsiness ; in fact she had what was known as a monkey poop, reached by a ladder of only four steps from the main-deck. No yacht could have been finer aft ; her counter sloped downward and slightly forward for about four feet, then melted away into a beautiful run.

I walked along the quay, pausing after every few steps to admire. Her lower-masts were iron, her topmasts and topgallant-mast of pitch pine. Five yards lay across each of the fore and main-masts ; of those, the lower ones had been cock-billed for cargo work, the others squared into such perfect precision as to suggest that while bracing them the mate had used a sextant. Every spar was delicately tapered, and every wire rope of the standing rigging had been set up as taut as a harp string ; in the regular mesh of running rigging and blocks which connected the yards with each other and with the deck, there was not a rope-yarn out of place. Obviously her last mate had treated her with the loving care she deserved.

I walked forward till I was ahead of her. Noble as was every line and curve throughout the two hundred feet of her length, it was the marvellous beauty of her bows that gave the most exquisite expression of grace and speed. From about abreast of the foremast her black-painted plates, with the pink boot-topping beneath them, fined away in flowing lines till the fineness culminated in a knife-like stem, which swept, curving beautifully, from the water's edge upwards and forwards till it met the white



figure-head under the slanting bowsprit. She would be about eight hundred tons, and she floated in that dock as gracefully as a swan—the handy barque of my dreams.

Lest any think that, in my admiration for this vessel which I had, so to speak, stumbled across, I am exaggerating—or that I was at the time no great judge of beauty—let me say that a quarter of a century later I had striking confirmation of my opinion from one who is certainly a knowledgeable judge. For this is what I read in John Masefield's 'Collected Poems':—

"... the perfect *J. T. North*,  
The loveliest barque my city has sent forth."

Well, the point is that the *J. T. North* and the *John Lockett* were sister ships. They belonged to W. & J. Lockett, of Liverpool, who, besides being shipowners, were general merchants trading to Chili. At the time they owned four beautiful barques, and they grudged no expense on their upkeep.

I could not tear myself away from that barque. Cargo was being discharged out of the main hatch, and as I strolled aft again I thought of a reasonable excuse for going aboard. I had never been on the West Coast, though by that time the nitrate trade had become one of the most important in the world for sailing-ships; but I had heard a great deal about it and the life on it, which seemed to be entirely unrelated to any other life I had known.



There loading was carried out in open roadsteads, with many interruptions from surf days and feast days, and the ship's own crew worked the cargo.

Nitrate is heavy stuff, running something like six bags to the ton; and that was what gave me an excuse for going aboard the *John Lockett*. In most sailing-ships it was necessary to carry a third of the cargo above the 'tween-deck beams so as to raise the weight and thus prevent excessive rolling in a seaway; but with very heavy cargoes, such as nitrate and copper ore, this presented a difficult problem; for a ship would be right down to her marks with the lower hold half-full. For copper ore, stout wooden trunks were constructed on platforms and supported from the ship's side by strong wooden shores. The ore was loaded into the trunks, raising the weight and concentrating it amidships; and obviously the safety of the ship depended on the strength of the trunk. With nitrate no such trunks were used—and that was what I wanted to inquire about.

I had been told that the hold of a vessel loaded with nitrate was, to the uninitiated, a frightening sight. Both lower hold and 'tween-decks were more than half empty, and into this emptiness there rose from the keelson an elongated pyramid of full bags which tapered up to the 'tween-deck, on which was laid another pyramid rising to the main-deck. What frightened one was that neither of those pyramids had any lateral support, one could walk right round them, between them and the

ship's side ; there was nothing, so far as one could see, to prevent the bags falling off, nothing indeed to prevent the whole pyramid shifting bodily.

I had been told about the method of loading : one man stowed the whole ship—one Chilian, who was usually small, wiry, and very tough. The ship's hands hove up the bags—one at a time, with a dolly winch—out of a lighter alongside, and lowered them through the hatch down into the hold. The first few bags went to form a platform on to which the succeeding bags were deposited ; then transferred to the shoulders of the Chilian, who staggered off to where he wanted to drop them ; and it was said that once he dropped the bag it was never moved again. Every successive layer of bags in the pile was two short—one on each side—and so the piles were tapered off.

My informant suggested that the weight of the individual bags made such stowage possible ; but it seems to me that the first shipmaster who took his ship to sea with her hold in such a condition, prepared to face a Cape Horn passage, must have had high courage in addition to wonderful faith. The faith was certainly justified ; no one has ever heard of a nitrate cargo shifting—and I was about to discover the real reason.

A temporary gangway, with a rope rove through iron stanchions for a rail, ran from the quay to the topgallant rail. I crossed it and gained the main-deck just as I made a significant discovery. The cargo was being discharged in bulk, in iron



tubs; yet I knew it had been loaded singly in bags. I could not see anyone who resembled a sailor, so I went along to the main-hatch and looked down. Stevedores were breaking out the nitrate with picks and shovelling it, well mixed with shreds of sacking, into a tub. The whole cargo had solidified till it resembled frozen snow. At last I had the complete answer!

I spoke to the foreman stevedore, and learned that the mate was away on holiday and that there was only the captain on board. "There he is now," the foreman said.

Coming up out of the companionway was a man with a closely trimmed beard; he was wearing bowler hat and carrying a neatly rolled umbrella. He looked hard at me as he came down on to the main-deck, and I felt I had to explain my presence; for I had certainly no right to be snooping around a strange vessel, especially a superior vessel like that. "Good morning, sir," I said, and raised my hat.

"Good morning to you," he answered.

He was very nice about my being on board uninvited, indeed he seemed pleased that a young officer on holiday should be so keen on his profession as to want to know about the stowage of a nitrate cargo. He asked me where I had served my time, and about my last ship, then said he must be going down into the cabin for his wife as they were going shopping. He was half-way up the monkey poop ladder, and I was making



for the gangway, when he turned. "Did you say you had been second mate of a Nova Scotian barquentine?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"H'm! I shall be wanting a second mate before I leave here," he said. "I'm going to the Tyne to load for Valparaiso and Iquique. Usual run, you know; she's a regular West Coast trader. Would you be interested in the job?"

I hesitated, for my holiday had just begun, and he noticed it. "Well, there's no hurry," he said. "If you do feel like it come on board one morning next week and bring your references."

"Thank you, sir," I said.

## II.

A miserable week of indecision followed, and I hate indecision. Certainly the *John Lockett* was the barque of my dreams, but did I want to continue in sail, which was even then fighting a losing battle against the encroaching steamers? Anyone with vision could see that within a quarter of a century there would be few sailing vessels afloat. Why then not get into steam on the ground floor, as it were? Why go off for another nine or ten months voyage in sail?

Of more intimate concern—it did not require any great mathematical ability to calculate that the *John Lockett* was going to be off Cape Horn in



the dead of winter, and I had had about as much of Cape Horn as I wanted, and a good deal more. And I have never known anyone who, having once weathered Cape Horn outward bound, showed any eagerness whatever to repeat the performance. Many did so year after year from necessity—few, I fancy, from choice. Homeward bound was quite a different matter; few Cape Horners bothered much about *that*.

During the last voyage of my apprenticeship in the *Routenburn* we had put in well over a month beating backwards and forwards, mostly under short canvas, across that abomination of desolation, the stormy tract of ocean which lies between Tierra del Fuego and the fringe of the Antarctic ice; trying to weather Cape Horn to the westward in the teeth of the great west wind, the driving squalls of sleet and snow, and the towering, rushing seas which surged continuously at her, exerting their terrific pressure to drive her back to leeward and hinder every attempt to make westing.

After that month of sodden misery there was not a man on board who did not vow, by all his gods, that he would never do the same thing again. All that had happened in the spring, yet here was I toying with the idea of doing it in the winter. The epic of the Horn bulks big in the history of sail; and so menacing, indeed frightening, was the operation of rounding it to the westward that few seamen could think of it without a shudder. And yet . . .

I managed to get in some finnock and trout fishing on the Dee, but hardly a day passed without a short visit to the docks. I simply could not keep away from them; and when, a fortnight later, the *John Lockett* towed out between the piers with a crew of runners aboard to take her to South Shields, I was there too.

After we had been safely berthed in Tyne Dock the captain and his wife went home to Liverpool, leaving me to carry on with the cook, a tall, angular, humorous Aberdonian, who puzzled me. My instinct told me he was an elderly man—too old for the galley of a Cape Horner in winter, but there was not a grey hair on his head.

We loaded a Tyne general cargo of bricks and various odds and ends with, for broken stowage, a lot of coke, which I was glad to see, for it was light stuff and would help to make the barque easier in a seaway. I took a greater interest in the cargo than second mates usually did; for I knew that, in accordance with the custom of the Coast, I would have to play a big part in working it out. On the whole it was a clean cargo, a welcome change from the outward coal cargoes I had been used to.

After a fortnight of loneliness what might be called the first of the permanent staff arrived. He was the mate, and had already made three voyages in the *John Lockett*. He was a gentleman from Dublin—and I use the word gentleman deliberately.



He was big, burly, genial, and a magnificent seaman; and very soon I was left in no doubt about who was responsible for the barque's well-being and appearance. He introduced himself to me; then, before going to his cabin, took a turn round the deck to see what had happened to his charge while he had been away from her.

Little could escape those piercing blue eyes, but on the whole he was satisfied; for, as he explained, ports are no good for ships and he had expected more trouble than he found. The decks, which had been holystoned clean, then oiled during the homeward passage, had been cut up round the hatches by the hobnailed boots of workmen; the ends of various ropes had been frayed; there were dirty finger-marks on the white paintwork and scratches on the varnished teakwood. "You get the same every voyage," the mate growled. "You bring your ship into a home port shining like a new dollar in a sweep's paw, and within a few days she gets into a state like this. But we'll soon put her to rights when we get to sea; and, praise be, we have no filthy dock-wallopers on board when we're on the Coast."

The next to rejoin were the two brassbounders: Stanley, who had made two voyages, and Dan, who had made one. They were nice lads, but to my mind they were too subdued; they lacked devil. The apprentices I had known, and I include myself, were a wild, graceless lot of young savages. Dangerous, heart-breaking work carried on under

appalling conditions at all hours of the night and day; bad and insufficient food; broken sleep, of which they never got half enough, could not quell their youthful spirits. In spite of being disciplined by hardened mates, who had passed through the half-deck themselves and knew every move, the very qualities of self-reliance, endurance and resource, which they possessed in abundance, urged the brassbounders on to reckless mischief. It was in port that they were at their very best, or worst, as the police archives in many of the world's largest ports could testify.

There was, for instance, the case of the very famous Liverpool clipper which lost a large golden cock from the main truck; mounted there to the chagrin of the other ships, in support of a claim that she was the fastest sailing vessel in the port of Calcutta. The loss of the cock completely baffled the harbour police for over a month; then at dawn one day it was observed mounted on the main truck of a ship which had just unmoored and was towing down the river. It was found later that two of that ship's apprentices had gone off in a native dinghy in the middle of the night, climbed 150 feet above the deck, removed the cock, and swam to their ship with it, though the Hughli is one of the most dangerous rivers in the world. The night before their own ship sailed they climbed to her main truck and nailed their prize to it. For sheer dare-devilry that prank would be hard to beat.



The Sydney police could tell of another that would be hard to equal for effrontery. One of their constables, standing on Circular Quay one early morning and watching a very well-known London wool and passenger clipper being towed to sea, noticed a strange sight—and at the same time solved a mystery—for dangling from the jib-boom end were the three brass balls from one of the largest pawnbroker's establishments in the city! I could imagine Jack Boag taking part in such escapades, and I daresay he could imagine the same about me; but Stanley and Dan, no! Of course, it may be that a half-deck containing only two was not capable of breeding the right type of brassbounder; I wouldn't know; I never lived in a half-deck which had less than six.

The next to arrive on board the *John Lockett* belonged to a calling that was quite new to me. He was a lad of about sixteen, not an apprentice, for he wasn't brassbound. He looked like an office boy, and I thought he was one till I saw his sea-chest. He reported to the mate that his name was Sidney and he was the new cabin boy; which did not surprise the mate, as it did me, for the *John Lockett* always carried one. Up till then cabin boys had been known to me only through the pages of fiction, in which they always made good and became captains; and there was the widely circulated story of the cabin boy who became a Viceroy. Now it is true that the famous Lord Reading first saw Calcutta from the deck of a sailing-ship, and

that the next time he saw it he was Viceroy of India ; but, alas for romance, he was not a cabin boy. He was an apprentice—now called a cadet—in the beautiful full-rigged ship *Blair Athole*, a vessel that went missing with all hands the voyage after he left her.

Sidney had never before been away from home. He was a nice lad, with an insatiable greed for knowledge, and legs just made for pulling, singly or together, a fact of which that incorrigible humorist the mate took full advantage. He came from either Dover or Folkestone, and his father, a business man, had dealings with the Locketts. I gathered that he was being sent off on their winter voyage round the Horn to cure him of his desire to follow the sea as a profession. A drastic cure !

The *John Lockett* did not carry a steward, so Sidney kept the cabin and the officers' rooms clean and tidy ; fetched the meals from the galley, and laid them on the table ; and in fact did all the work usually done by a steward except looking after the stores. Those were too precious to be left in the inexperienced hands of a cabin boy, and were looked after by the captain himself.

The following day the stores arrived, and while the mate checked them I had the job of seeing them stowed away. In the *John Lockett* that job was a sinecure ; there would be no need to search the half-deck bunks and sea-chests for tins of condensed milk, or indeed for anything that was not too hot or heavy to be carried away ; for I



could hardly imagine either Stanley or Dan as amateur burglars.

The barque was now almost ready for sea and the captain, still wearing his bowler hat and carrying his neatly rolled umbrella, came back from his holiday. Two days later the crew was signed on, and I have never attended a more respectable ceremony. The only Britons were the captain and the two mates, the cook, Stanley, Dan, and Sidney. The carpenter was a Dane, the sailmaker a Swede, and good men they were. By that time British sailing-ships were carrying many more foreigners than Britons in their forecastles. The more respectable British seamen were finding plenty of work in the great liners, and even in tramp steamers they were better paid and better fed than they were in windjammers; although there was a race of sailormen—alas! even then dying out—who would never go into steam.

Unfortunately the remaining diehards were often the scum of the ports—hard-bitten, truculent, and prone to getting drunk when they got the chance. In consequence, many shipmasters preferred the milder and more docile foreigners—mostly Scandinavians, referred to as Dutchmen, and Italians, known as Dagoes—although most ships had a few British seamen who, no matter how objectionable, could always be depended on in times of danger and crisis. Obviously our captain did not believe in that idea, though he drew the line at Dagoes, and every man before the mast was a Scandinavian.

They were fine men and thorough seamen, and so well dressed and respectable to look at that when I saw them lined up on the pavement outside the Mercantile Marine Office in South Shields, waiting to sign on, I might have mistaken them for worshippers outside a church on a Sunday. That suited our captain; respectability at any price was his motto.

So there was the *John Lockett*, ready for sea; in good sailing trim, well found and well manned. Nothing could have been better, except that far, far away to the southward there loomed the dread spectre of the Horn—in winter.

### III.

Next morning at daylight we hauled out of Tyne Dock into the river. The tug which our barque obediently followed towed her out between the piers in the teeth of a north-easterly wind. When outside she dropped the pilot and with an offing of about five miles the captain ordered the tug to let go. At that time many masters of sailing-ships took a North Sea pilot as far as Dover, but our captain was a careful man with money—both his own and his owners'—besides being supremely self-confident, and he had decided he could do very well without one, as pilotage was not compulsory.

The lower topsails were sheeted home; the towrope was let go, and the tug hovered to wind-



ward while the slim black hull of our barque forged slowly past her under the thrust of the two sails. When we had passed ahead of her the tug gave us a few farewell toots on her steam whistle, then turned and made back for the river. All eyes followed her as she went ; some with envy, others with an indifference that represented the lowly state of their finances. It was time to make more sail. Already the lone upper canvas was blowing out to the breeze ; sheets were dragged home and yards hoisted ; the pyramids of canvas grew.

It soon became evident to me that the *John Lockett* had a grand crew, and that she was indeed a handy barque. One of the things the old-time sailor loathed was what he called "big ropes and small blocks." What he really meant was block so constructed that when the ropes of a tackle became only slightly swollen, as they did in wet weather, it was difficult to get them to render round the sheaves ; and this was often aggravated by lack of oil or grease so that the sheaves stuck. In our barque all the principal blocks had ball bearings, and those that had not were in such perfect order that the ropes seemed to run through them of their own accord. A handy barque indeed ! there never was a handier ! Everything else on board seemed to be in the same condition as the blocks ; and I had never seen sail got on a ship so quickly and smoothly. The whole complex operation of setting twenty-seven sails went without a hitch, and indeed it would be difficult to imagine

a hitch under the mate's piercing eye, which seemed to cover everything.

Left alone save for a few trawlers making in for the Tyne, and the gulls that hovered and screamed round the trucks and yard-arms and created the only noise that marred the smooth silence of our sailing, the barque stood to the southward. On she went, picking her dainty way past inshore fishing-boats as the land glided away, then faded. It would seem almost incongruous to use the word dainty in association with a West Coast barque, which by reason of the trade in which she was employed, and the nature of the cargoes she carried, had, beyond everything, to be strong and sturdy. Year in and year out these vessels doubled Cape Horn; usually down to their marks outward with coal or machinery, equally deep with copper ore or nitrate homeward; and yet I refuse to withdraw the word dainty as applied to the *John Lockett*.

As usual, sailing day had been a long and arduous one, but it was brought to an end at last by the setting of the sun and the picking of the watches. The mate had the first pick, and by the time the hands had been divided equally between us, eight bells—eight o'clock—were struck. The decks having been cleared up for the night the port watch, which was the mate's, was free to go below, while I, with the starboard watch, took over the deck. The brisk activity of sailing day sank into the dullness of day-to-day routine.

On the weather side of the poop I paced fore



and aft keeping my watch ; on the fore-castle-head the man on the look-out stood erect between the flukes of the anchors, which were securely lashed down to ring-bolts ; on the main-deck, between us, the other hands of the watch, in couples, also paced fore and aft. I remember that during those four hours before midnight I had time to make a summary of my impressions ; and among them was that the mate, though a strict disciplinarian, had a very keen sense of humour ; whereas the captain, equally strict regarding discipline, had no sense of humour whatever. Instead, he was serious and pedantic, prone to lecture and find fault. At the same time I felt quite certain that between those two prime seamen I was likely to be a much better officer at the end of the voyage than I was when it started.

The barque ran easily before the north-east wind. She was not an extreme clipper ; she was never likely to reach the high speeds attained by the ocean greyhounds which used to race home with the first of the China tea crop, or the Australian wool clip ; and yet surprisingly few ships going the same way ever passed her at sea. She just had the supreme virtue of keeping on steadily ; it did not take a gale of wind to move her, but only a dead calm would stop her completely. On she went, past lighthouses set high on headlands and red-hulled lightships marking shoals with names that sounded as quaint to the ears of a blue-water seaman as to those of a landsman—Cross Sand, Smith's Knoll, and Outer Dowsing—and such was her

steady progress down the North Sea that she was soon in a position to leave it. When I went on the poop to keep the middle watch at midnight next day she had safely negotiated the heavy traffic making for the Thames estuary from the eastward, passed outside the Goodwin Sands and brought the East Goodwin Lightship abeam.

She was running for the bottleneck of the Straits of Dover, with the flashing light of the South Goodwin Lightship fine on the starboard bow and the more powerful light of the South Foreland open beyond it. After the wheel and look-out had been relieved the mate lingered with me for about five minutes, and I was glad he did, for never had I seen such a confusing display of lights. They lay all along the starboard bow, and before long the loom of the powerful light on Cape Gris Nez showed up on the other bow. The rows of lights of Dover and Folkestone were showing, and I wondered if Sidney was awake to see the last of his native town. Of more consequence to me were the lights afloat, which were everywhere—white lights, red lights mostly on one bow, green lights on the other, and the man on the look-out kept reporting more.

I was not alone, of course ; you would not find the captain of the *John Lockett* leaving the poop in the middle of one of the most congested tracts of water in the world. He stood alongside the starboard mizzen rigging, with his binoculars almost in constant use ; while I hovered about the break of the poop answering the reports from the look-



*JOHN LOCKETT* LEAVING THE TYNE



FRANK H. MASON



out and passing them on to the captain if I thought he had not heard them.

For the first two hours of my watch all went well, though there was a perceptible tenseness everywhere; for the deep-water seaman was usually uneasy in narrow waters where there was a lot of traffic. It was most evident down on the main-deck where the men of the watch, instead of sitting on one of the spare spars, or on the main-hatch, were standing upright by the bulwark rail. The captain, as usual, was supremely confident, and trusting him implicitly, I had been lulled into a sense of security. Then, just as we got abreast of Dover Pier, something happened which gave me the fright of my young life, and nearly sent the beautiful barque I had come to love so much to the bottom of the Straits.

With the wind broad on the starboard quarter we were doing about eight knots; it was a clear, starry night, though the wind had in it a dampness that threatened fog later on if it should die down. The man on the look-out reported a light on the lee bow. "Light on the lee bow!" I repeated to the captain.

"There are half a dozen lights on the lee bow," he answered testily. "Which one does he mean?"

"I expect it's the green one, sir," I said.

"Green one—on the port bow!" the captain cried. "Where?"

A green light on the port bow suggested danger, but it was little wonder he had not noticed it;

for it was dim compared to the mast-head light, and the rows of lighted portholes to which it was attached. The captain got his binoculars on to it. "H'm!" he said uneasily. "One of those fast cross-Channel packets trying to cross our bows!" Another look with the binoculars. "Mind your steering!" he shouted to the helmsman. "Steady as you go!"

It was my turn to feel uneasy, for a dangerous situation had developed with alarming suddenness. The cross-Channel steamer would be travelling at something like twenty knots, and the two vessels were converging in such a way that unless one of them altered course they were bound to meet. We could do nothing about it. Under the 'Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea' a steam vessel must keep out of the way of a sailing vessel; and, further, Article 21 read: "When by any of these Rules one of two vessels is to keep out of the way, the other shall keep her course and speed." If we did not, and a collision occurred, we should be held to blame—if any of us were left alive to *take* the blame after the crash. The uneasiness had spread to the main-deck, where the hands were shuffling their feet and talking excitedly. "Silence down there!" the captain called sternly. He turned to me. "Call all hands on deck," he said.

All hands on deck! Was he about to try some manœuvre at the last moment? It was not till I had sent Dan down to call the mate, and one of



the hands to rouse the forecastle and the midship house, that I realised he was giving the men below a chance to save their lives. I stood beside him watching his set, drawn face, and the staring eyes riveted on the other vessel; and only three words escaped him during that intense period of anxiety. "The murdering idiots!" he hissed vindictively.

Closer and closer; the suspense was dreadful; as I waited with nerves on edge and breath hard held, I felt the crash was inevitable—and still that menacing steamer was coming on full speed in an insane attempt to get across our bows. I heard a voice which I had difficulty in recognising as the captain's say: "Too late, you fool!"

The steamer's lights seemed to dance and wheel before my eyes, till I thought the strain had affected them; then I knew what had happened. At last those on the steamer's bridge had realised the danger of crossing in front of us and were making an effort to avoid it; they had altered course to starboard in a last moment attempt to go under our stern. Was there still time, and room? I, anyhow, did not think so; it seemed to me like deliberate murder and suicide combined. The captain threw his arms upward, as if appealing to high heaven.

We could now see the steamer's hull clearly; we could even see the deck in the glare of the deck lights, and there were passengers standing on it. The red side-light opened out and for a brief moment, as the steamer drove straight at us, both lights

were showing together; then the green one was shut out, leaving the red one glaring in its place. This could only mean that she was pointing clear of our poop, but she was so close that I was certain her masts and funnels must foul our lee braces. Choking black smoke from her funnels blew across us, and fumes from stokehold and engine-room came over in sickening wafts.

She must have been particularly nimble on her helm; for she had come round till she was almost on a parallel opposite course when her bow came roaring by in a welter of foam, with spray from the great bow-wave coming over us in a shower. Her head seemed to be still swinging to starboard and there was now a real danger that her stern would swing into us round about the foremast. The speed at which the vessels were passing each other left me breathless. The double rows of lighted portholes set in her black hull, and the deck-lights above it, were fused by it into long blurred lines of light. Just as her bridge came abreast, a man—probably the captain—moved to the wing of it, and was so close that I felt I could have shaken hands with him, if I had wanted to. He leaned right out over the rail and stared astern, then shouted an order which was repeated from the middle of the bridge by the man at the wheel.

I *will* say this for the man: if he had been guilty of an error of judgment in getting his vessel into such a predicament, he had displayed wonderful skill in getting her out of it; and he *had* got her



out of it. By then her swinging bow was cutting across our wake while the rushing stream created by the wash of her propellers was opening out from our quarter; the shadowy hull, with the long blurred lines of lights, was passing behind us; we could see the hunched-up figure of our helmsman between us and the swiftly moving mass. Relieved and exhausted, our captain sank back against the broad teakwood rail that ran round the poop—and delivered a lecture on officers of high speed cross-Channel steamers and their arrogant carelessness.

It was amazing. I had noted that he was pedantic, and that I must be prepared to receive a lecture from him on any subject under the sun, at any time of the night and day—but this was quite beyond belief. A few moments before he had been on the very verge of an appalling catastrophe; now he was as matter of fact as a university professor delivering a lecture on moral philosophy. It was almost more than my tingling nerves could endure, and I welcomed the appearance of a small group approaching from the direction of the taffrail. It consisted of the mate—who was carrying the dial of the patent log, which he had removed from the taffrail, and a length of log-line—young Sidney shivering in his pyjamas, and the Danish carpenter. "That criminal has gone off with our patent log and half the line, sir," the mate reported.

"If *that* is all the damage he has done, we're fortunate, mister," the captain answered. "I was

sure he was going to sink us ; and, anyhow, we don't need the log now."

It was only round the coast that we used the patent log ; in the open sea we used the hand one. The little group moved aft again and, thankfully, I moved with it. "The officers of those Dover steamers are like a lot of Deal hovellers—regular pirates," the mate remarked. "I shouldn't wonder if your father had something to do with pinching our log, Sidney ; he's a hoveller, isn't he ?"

"No, sir," the outraged Sidney spluttered indignantly. "He's a ship-chandler."

"H'm ! same thing !" said the mate.

"That steamer didn't belong to Dover, sir ; she wasn't even British," Sidney said.

"Ja, dat vos so ; he vos Belgian," the carpenter confirmed ; and in spite of difficulty with letters like "w" and "y," he was the best linguist in the ship.

"How did you make that out ?" the mate demanded.

"The order the captain shouted from the side of the bridge ven she passed, and the answer from the man at the veel vos in Flemish," the Dane retorted.

The port watch was dismissed ; the mate, Sidney and the carpenter went below, and I rejoined the captain with information that gave him a subject for yet another lecture. The excitement died down and the remainder of the watch passed without incident.

Still carrying the fresh, north-east wind on the



quarter, and with all sail set, the *John Lockett* swept down Channel; and three and a half days after leaving the Tyne she passed, and signalled, the Lizard. The next day she was out in the broad Atlantic, and when the mate relieved me for the first dog-watch there was nothing in sight but a French fishing lugger. Apart from her, the sea was empty right out to the horizon on both sides. The mate looked round with satisfaction and took a deep breath. "Out here a man can breathe without being choked by fumes from filthy funnels, and be safe from blundering lunatics in charge of twenty-knot cross-Channel boats," he said.

"We've made a fine start to the passage, anyhow," I remarked.

"Mister," he replied, "it's off the Horn that a passage is made, or marred."

The Horn! Always the Horn was somewhere at the back of our minds!

#### IV.

The voyage had begun in earnest. The wind remained fair and our barque foamed her way to the southward in a great circular solitude of which she was the centre. Usually she was alone, but occasionally another wandering white speck would make a brief appearance within the circle. On the third day out a large four-masted barque appeared on the rim of it, hull down to the west-

ward and with only her sails showing—another receptacle for the hopes and fears of sailormen—going her own way and intent on her own business. By daylight the next day she had disappeared; and whether she had gone ahead of us, or dropped astern, or simply sheered farther to the westward, we did not know.

Life and work went on regularly and smoothly, regulated by the half-hourly striking of the bells, ruled by the vagaries of the wind. Night and day a man was by the wheel; the grating on which the helmsman stood was never vacant for a moment. The work of the ship was carried on by the two watches in relays. It started with the washing down of the decks at half-past five in the morning and continued till half-past five in the evening when the decks were cleared up. Nothing but the trimming of the yards or the setting or shortening of sail was allowed to interfere with that.

With the striking of eight bells during the daylight hours the watch that had been below for four hours relieved the watch on deck automatically; by night the change over always required a muster when for a brief period all hands would be on deck together. Every day at noon, after we had been ten days out, there was another muster—this time to make sure that every man on board drunk his issue of lime-juice, or fortified lemon-juice, as an anti-scorbutic. To this an occasional conscientious objector might be found at the beginning of a voyage, but he got short shrift.



The first event to break the ordered monotony of the voyage was the opening of the slop chest—the captain's shop. Oilskins, sea-boots, thick shirts and other articles of clothing were laid out on the cabin table along with plugs of tobacco, packets of matches and bars of soap. Sidney was the salesman, but the captain hovered round—ostensibly indifferent, but, in reality, deeply interested, for it was his own private venture. The hands felt, and looked, awkward as they entered the "shop"; for men before the mast were never quite at home in a ship's cabin.

It was during the second dog-watch—from six o'clock till eight—that Sidney announced the opening of the shop, but it was not much of a success on that first evening. The men seemed to have developed what is now known as "sales resistance" to an extent that was far from the captain's liking. As the mate remarked to me, the old man couldn't have it both ways. He could hardly expect thrifty Squareheads who joined the ship sober and well-dressed, eagerly to pay fancy sea-prices like parish-rigged British seamen who were down to their last shilling and had mortgaged their month's advance of pay to boarding-house keepers to get away from their squalid lodgings.

About a fortnight out from the Lizard we passed clear of a belt of calms, where we had experienced a series of heavy rain squalls, into the north-east trades; where men hardly required clothes, and certainly did not require boots; for all hands

save the officers went barefooted. The north-east trades—the seaman's paradise, where the wind hardly varied a point in direction or a couple of knots in strength; and braces, tacks, or sheets were rarely touched for days on end. With the breeze on the port quarter we went sweeping down toward the equator, while the sun climbed higher every day, though the weather never became really hot.

The sky was blue, save for fleecy trade-wind clouds; the sea was bluer still. From the sheltered troughs between the waves shoals of flying-fish rose like winged bars of mother-of-pearl, skimmed the crests and dropped back exhausted to where their enemies—swift albacore and bonito—awaited them. The barque leaned over lightly to the pressure of the wind, swayed back ever so gently, and leaned over again. The hum of the wind in the rigging made sweet music; the splash of the breaking bow-wave, and the swirl of the passing wash, soothed and lulled on those heavenly nights when the hands of the watch on deck dozed on the main-hatch, and only the officer, the helmsman, and the man on the look-out were really awake.

Occasionally the perfect peace would be broken by a flying-fish coming on board over the lee rail and flapping about in the scuppers; whereupon Stanley or Dan, supposed to be keeping time on the lee side of the poop, would snap into sudden wakefulness, and dash for the spot—often, alas! to be beaten to it by the cat, who knew as much



about the game as they did. Many a tasty breakfast they lost in this way; and the loss was not made easier to bear by the sarcastic remarks of the officer of the watch. I knew all about it; many a breakfast I had lost the same way in the *Routenburn*; for the *John Lockett's* Ginger was not the only cat who could catch flying-fish.

After three days the first boisterous thrust of the trade wind had settled down to a steady breeze, and the captain decided that the time was ripe for shifting the sails. What had been set up till then was the heavy weather suit—the newest and best sails on board—and no ship carried them aloft through the tropics. In the doldrums, especially, there was much chafing when the sails flapped against the masts, and old canvas was good enough for that. We began at half-past five one morning, and before sunset every sail in the ship had been changed. The heavy weather sails had been unbent, sent down on deck, rolled up neatly and stowed away in the sail locker—and as each sail came down an older one went up in its place. In addition, of course, all the ropes for setting and clewing up the sails had to be shifted.

With the brave trade wind blowing about us it was a day to stir the blood and make the pulses leap; a day of keen rivalry between the watches, with the mate's watch working the foremast, and my watch the main. A day of strenuous activity; of hoisting the old sails to the tune of loud working cries or an occasional chanty; of running up and

down the rigging and laying out along the yards. It was not till I sat down to supper in the cabin at six o'clock that I realised how tired I was; and it was then I learned that, by the captain's orders, the main lower topsail had been left unrolled.

I was soon told the reason. Besides being a scientific navigator, he claimed to be an up-to-date, progressive seaman and he was always ready to try something new. While at home in Liverpool he had read an article, and taken part in some discussions, on what he called "perforated sails," and he was about to try an experiment. The theory was that if holes were made in a sail, close down to the clews, or corners, the cushion of wind abaft the sail would be dispersed and the wind would blow directly on the surface of the canvas. He lectured to the mate and me on the subject at some length; and while I listened with rapt attention, or pretended to, all he could get out of the mate was an enigmatic, "H'm!" In any case it was entirely a matter between the captain and the sailmaker.

The following morning we took the topsail along to the main-hatch, where those two got busy on it. Under the captain's directions the sailmaker cut holes about six inches in diameter just above the clews, and sewed rope grommets to the canvas to prevent fraying and give strength. Later all the sails would be done so that they would be ready for the experiment the next time the sails were shifted. After breakfast Sidney, of the inquiring



mind, tackled Dan about it. Unfortunately the conversation took place just outside the mate's room, with the mate in it, and the porthole looking out on the main-deck open.

"Well, *you* ought to know," Dan said in answer to Sidney's eager questions.

"*Me!* Why?"

"You're in charge of the slop chest; at least, you're the head counter-jumper."

"What's *that* got to do with it?" Sidney demanded.

"Now, look," said Dan. "You're ruddy shop hasn't done too well so far, and it looks as if we were all set for a quick passage; so the old man works it out that we'll be round the Horn before he sells any of his posh oilskins, and right into Valpo harbour before he gets rid of half the plugs of tobacco, and the soap and matches. So he decides to cut holes in the sails to let the wind blow through and so take a couple of knots off her speed."

Somewhat shaken by this suggestion of corruption in high places, the mystified Sidney returned to his job of scrubbing the cabin floor, leaving a highly satisfied Dan behind him. The satisfaction did not last long. At noon Stanley took over the job Dan was doing, and the younger boy, after drinking his limejuice, went to the galley for his mid-day meal. He finished a plate of thick, bright-yellow pea soup, and the small bit of salt pork that went with it, scrubbed his plate with a piece

of canvas and salt water; and, yawning heartily, prepared to slide into his bunk. A portly figure darkened the doorway.

"Dan," the mate said, "you will proceed up to the main royal yard and sit on it till four bells. Don't go to sleep up there or you're liable to make a nasty mess on the deck when you stop falling. Go on, up you get."

Wearily Dan swung himself into the rigging and prepared for a climb of 140 feet. "And the next time you cast aspersions on the captain take care I'm not about to hear you," the mate added.

Up there, within a few feet of the main truck, surveying a vast expanse of empty ocean and dreadingly waiting for the bell to tell him it was two o'clock, Dan had ample time to meditate on man's inhumanity to man—or rather on the inhumanity of ship's officers who were well enough educated to know better. It is doubtful if he guessed the real reason for his mastheading, which was poaching—poaching on the mate's preserves; for Sidney was that officer's bird. The mate had been expecting that question about the sails and had thought out an answer that was no more truthful than Dan's, though much more ingenious. *Obscurum per obscurius* was a favourite game of the mate's.

Trivial incidents such as that bulked big in the ordered, humdrum routine of our fine-weather sailing, and Dan's punishment, and the reason for it, was eagerly discussed during the second dog-watch, the one period of time when nobody on board wants



to sleep and the hands of both watches can mingle. As a topic of conversation it would not appear to be particularly interesting, but it *was* a topic—and after all there was no morning newspaper in the trades.

It was at that time that I became worried about the cook, in whom I had a particular interest; he was the only man on board who, like me, had joined the ship in Aberdeen, and I liked him. He had a cheerful outlook on life and a fund of pawky Scottish humour. I was worried about his health, for, among other things, his hair was turning white. I had heard—who hasn't?—of men whose hair has turned white in a single night—usually from fright; but here was a man who had a full crop of fair hair when we passed the Lizard, and now had hardly a fair hair on his head. His age, according to the articles, was only fifty, and I had looked upon him as an active man; but now, in addition to his ageing appearance, he seemed to be dragging his feet as he passed along the deck, and showing other signs of decay.

I should have liked to question him about his health, but knew he was very touchy on the subject. The sympathetic Sidney, with whom he worked in close collaboration, had been a little too sympathetic one day and had his ears boxed for his pains.

At last the old chap felt that he simply had to confide in someone, and as I was his best friend on board he confided in me. On a Sunday afternoon, when there was no one about, he intercepted

me and asked me to step into the galley. "Have you been to Valpo, sir?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I haven't, doctor," I said. "Why?"

"I was wondering if there were any good chemist's shops there."

"Sure to be; Valparaiso is one of the largest and most modern cities in South America," I told him. "But, look; if there's anything wrong with you I'll get something for you out of the medicine chest."

The cook shook his head sadly. "You can't get what I want out of any medicine chest, and I would be glad if you wouldn't mention it to anybody," he said. "You see, I started the voyage with a large bottle of my hair-dye and the first night out it rolled on to the deck and was smashed to pieces."

After that he let himself go. He confessed that he was nearer seventy than fifty; and said no captain would sign on a man of that age as cook, especially of a Cape Horner. He had been dyeing his hair, and carrying on with this deception for years, for he hated the idea of being laid on the shelf; ever, indeed, since, when signing on in a continental shipping office, a careless clerk had entered his age on the articles as forty-seven instead of sixty-seven.

I promised to keep his secret, and did; but I often felt uneasy. Cape Horn was no place for a man of seventy, and I thought of the *Routenburn's* galley as I had frequently seen it—with the fire



washed out, so that no cooking was possible, and heavy pots and pans flying about all over the place. I was sorely afraid that trying times were in store for the cook when we got down off the Horn.

## V.

When we got down off the Horn! Next day we crossed the equator; and suddenly the grim spectre of that still far-distant headland, now in the same hemisphere, loomed up before officers and men with an even more immediate menace. It seemed to have become more threatening with the last hundred miles we had sailed. The prudent Scandinavians in the fore-castle were the first to react to it; and as we stood steadily to the southward, oilskins, glistening with fresh coats of oil and stretched on hoops or broomsticks to dry, appeared on the fore-castle-head. One thrifty young Swede actually bought a pair of rubber sea-boots from the slop chest, because he was not quite sure that his leather ones were really watertight.

We were making a wonderful passage, having had no doldrums; in fact we had passed from the north-east trades to the south-east in the course of one squall. The south-east trades took us as far down as latitude  $27^{\circ}$  south before we lost them; then there came another stiff day of shifting sail. The threadbare fine-weather suit came down; the

stout, heavy-weather canvas went aloft, with every sail nicely perforated at the clews. What difference did the perforations make? To this day I do not know! Naturally the captain lectured at length on the innovation, and swore we were doing at least a knot better in moderate winds; while the mate, too tactful to contradict him, stuck to his enigmatic "H'm!" Short of getting her sister the *J. T. North* alongside her and sailing it out, I do not know how anything could be proved—but it added more interest to the voyage at a time when there was little else to interest.

Then the fine-weather sailing ceased abruptly. Within a week the heavy-weather suit of sails was being tested, and so were we; but while they stood up to the test well we were found somewhat wanting. It was off the mouth of the Plate that we ran into a *pampero* which set us feverishly shortening sail. It was the first bad weather of the voyage and it found us unprepared and awkward. When we reefed the main upper topsail—the weather was as bad as that—I found, when racing a big Swede for the honour of sitting astride the weather yard-arm and hauling out the reef earring, that I was neither so active nor so handy as I had been when doing the same thing aboard the *Kathleen* in the North Atlantic. Even the hands showed an awkwardness as they staggered about the heaving deck. The truth was that we were all out of practice.

The *pampero* passed, leaving a heavy swell behind



it; the wind went round to the southward and turned bitterly cold. For three days we beat against it; and, with our teeth chattering, thought of the far more bitter weather that awaited us farther south. It might well have been called a rehearsal for the Drama of the Horn—and when the slop chest was reopened one evening, that pushing salesman, Sidney, did quite a good business in blankets, serge shirts, and sea-boot stockings.

From that time onward thoughts of the terrible passage to the westward pressed with ever greater insistence; and while the fore-castle hands were preparing their clothing and boots for it, the mate was busy preparing the barque. All spare gear was stowed away under hatches; the boats and the spare spars on the main-deck were secured with stouter lashings; an extra tarpaulin was stretched over each hatch and more wedges were driven in. All the yards, the standing rigging and the running gear were examined for defects. Before the mate was satisfied, we were as ready for the expected battle against wind and wave as any experienced seaman, blessed with the best of gear at his disposal, could make us.

Before starting the voyage I had received a present of 'Anson's Voyage Around the World,' written by his chaplain, Richard Walter. It was in three volumes and had been first published in 1748. I had been reading it very carefully, and by the time the *John Lockett* was about abreast of the Falkland Islands I had reached that place in

the book where Anson's little squadron was in the same vicinity—which was somewhat unfortunate for my morale. Such passages as "Full of those despairing thoughts and gloomy passages we stood away to the S.W." could hardly act as a tonic; while the advice given in "Observations and Directions for facilitating the passage of our future cruisers round Cape Horn" was distinctly disturbing. Doubtless the good padre had only put into writing what Anson had told him, and it did me little good to read ". . . and would make a winter navigation on this coast to be, of all others, the most dismaying and terrible. And I would therefore advise all ships to make the passage in December and January (the mid-summer months) if possible, so I would advise them never to attempt to double Cape Horn from the eastward after the month of March."

Cheerful! we were about to attempt to double it in June—the very middle of winter! There was no reason in the world why we should meet with conditions in the way of wind and sea any less severe than Anson's ships experienced during their truly terrible passage—or indeed than I had experienced in the *Routenburn* two years before—but there was at least one evil from which we would be free. Thanks mainly to the daily dose of fortified lemon-juice, that terrible scourge of the old days, scurvy, held no terrors for us; whereas they had buried forty-three men from Anson's flagship, the *Centurion*, during the month of April 1741, and



nearly double that number in May. "With this terrible disease we struggled the greatest part of the time of our beating round Cape Horn," Richard Walter wrote; and again, "It usually killed those who were in the last stage of it, and confined to their hammocks those who were before capable of some kind of duty." No; we might have a few of the weaker men down with "Cape Horn fever," but that truly loathsome disease called scurvy was a scourge I had never known.

I told the mate about the book and he borrowed it by the simple method of taking it out of my room when I was not there. The next time he relieved me on the poop he was full of it, particularly of the "Observations and Directions." "It's wonderfu' to think those were written a hundred and fift years ago; for, to my mind, they're much sounder than the opinions held by a great number of British shipmasters to-day," he said. "They agree with the German theories; and look at the passages those 'P' ships of Hamburg make round the Horn. You won't find one of them held up for a month."

From the lowly view-point of the half-deck I had not hitherto realised that there were two distinct theories with regard to this rounding of Cape Horn; but there were, and the mate belonged to one school of thought while the captain belonged to the other. The mate believed, with Anson, that it was better to make a wide sweep of it; to pass well to the eastward of Staten Island and go right down to  $61^{\circ}$  or  $62^{\circ}$  south before trying to make

westing. The captain believed in cutting the corner fine; keeping fairly close to the land. "I would show this book to the old man; but it would be a waste of time, for he's as obstinate as a mule," the mate said. "'Make westing' he repeats like a parrot. Well, any ass knows that you must make westing or you can't get round at all, but you'll make it more certainly if you make southing first."

The combination of mule and parrot as applied to our captain appealed to my sense of humour, and I laughed. "It's no laughing matter," the mate said. "Look what this book says about the Straits of Le Maire. 'Keep away from them; never go near them.' Dead right! but you can't keep this old man away from them. You mark my words, he'll get nipped in that ghastly place some day."

Off the extreme south-eastern tip of the South American continent lies bleak Staten Island, separated from the mainland of Tierra del Fuego by a stretch of water called the Straits of Le Maire; and a more treacherous stretch of water would be hard to find. It is about five miles wide and fairly clear of obstructions. A five-mile strait would seem to give ample sea room to a vessel under control in the middle of it; but if, goaded by a terrific tide-rip, she suddenly takes the bit in her teeth, becomes unmanageable and charges toward the beach, two and a half miles does not give too much room in which to get her in hand again.



Many fine ships have left their ribs to rust on its foul coasts and on the kelp-fringed rocks which lie off them. Owing to the deeply ridged nature of the bottom there are violent overfalls in which ships, refusing to answer their helms, will turn right round; and there are violent gusts, called "williwaws," that rush down the mountain gorges and stretch like whirlwinds some distance offshore. Truly, as the mate had said, a ghastly place! A short-cut to the Horn, but not *round* it!

At four o'clock next day I relieved the mate for the morning watch. The sky had clouded over; a curious, cold, clammy dampness had come into the air—the Cape Horn dampness that chills men to the marrow. The mate sniffed it apprehensively. "The Horn," he remarked. "The fiercest enemy sailormen have got; and not ver far away."

He was a brave man, but he confessed to a nervous thrill, and insisted that few men who knew the Horn escaped that feeling of dread when they got into its vicinity. He went below leaving me alone with the helmsman, but before long the captain paid me a brief visit. "Keep a good lookout; we ought to be closing the land soon," he said, and went below again.

I paced the poop trying to keep warm, and longing for two bells when I might expect to see Sidney with the coffee. I had just got the scent of wood smoke from the galley funnel, and knew that the cook was awake and busy, when I heard

## VI.

I had not been asleep more than an hour when, heavy with it, I sat up and listened to a curious and most unnatural thudding noise. Then I noticed the barque was no longer heeling over to port; she seemed to be almost on an even keel, but at the same time was shuddering as if terrified. There was a tramping of feet on the main-deck and some shouting. Then came a knocking on my door, which was opened by a very agitated Sidney. "Sir, it's all hands on deck, sir!" he cried. "All hands on deck!"

I pulled on my long oilskin coat and my sea-boots and hurried up the companionway. When I emerged from it on to the poop my sea-booted feet, instead of treading firmly on deck planks, slithered in a soft carpet of snow. A sailor's first instinct was to look aloft; I did and saw that the sails, bereft of wind, were hanging limply up and down the masts; then, as I watched, they slatted heavily with claps like thunder as the barque pitched. I looked astern and what I saw there almost petrified me with horror. Less than a hundred yards away was a sheer precipice of solid rock!

How had it happened? Well, I soon heard about it from the mate, who had come up to report that the two lifeboats had been swung out ready for lowering. He gave the explanation in a few



rapid sentences. The *John Lockett* had been bowling through the strait with a strong north-westerly wind abeam, and had got about half-way through. To get smoother water, and also with some vague idea that he would thus get more help from the tidal current, the captain, with supreme confidence, was hugging the Tierra del Fuego shore. Everything was going well; this was glorious sailing, like yachting at its best; and the hands were in high spirits. All the hands who were on deck, that is—except the mate. He was just wondering if the luck would hold, and if the captain would get away with it, when, from out of a clear sky, there rushed one of the dreaded “williwaws,” and it was laden with snow. It caught the barque flat aback; and the mate said that a weaker vessel aloft—one that hadn’t the best of gear—would have been dismasted. After that no one but the mate had any idea what happened, and he confessed to being not very clear about it. Before they could get her under control again she was into a truly terrific tide-rip. The water was flung this way and that in vast eddies and furiously churning whirlpools; and to add to the confusion the driving snow was so thick that they could not see the fore-castle-head from the poop. It was a minute or two before they realised that a fierce current had taken her in its rigid grip and was sweeping her bodily toward the shore.

It was still snarling all round her as, the snow having cleared away, I could now see; and worst

of all, it had carried her under the lee of towering cliffs where she lay becalmed. Not a breath of wind could reach her sails. And the boats? The captain's first idea had been to get the anchors over; then he remembered that the coast was steep-to, and the operation, with shackling on the cables, and ranging them, would have taken far too long. With the current still sweeping us shoreward we would probably have to abandon ship; for against the heavy swell the boats could never have towed us out far enough for the wind to reach our sails. They now hung in the davits, ready to take us off if we had to go—"And if we have, God help us!" the mate said piously.

Obviously he thought little of our chance of survival; and as I looked from the stern, set face of the captain, whose gaze was concentrated on the beach, to the wild-eyed group of men gathered on the main-deck just below us, I realised that I must consider him right. Only the old cook, whose thick, matted hair was by then almost snowy white, smiled up at me and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Well, I've had a good innings; I'm ready to go." On the poop, with the carpenter, were the apprentices and Sidney—all looking somewhat bewildered. The helmsman stood beside the useless wheel—useless for lack of steerage way. There was no apparent panic; only a sort of dull apathy. I stood trying to collect my thoughts, for the running of the surf was most confusing.

The barque had been swept into a long crescent-



shaped bay, behind which the wildness and barren nature of the land were appalling. The mountains were snow-capped; beneath the snow was a broad, barren patch that looked like granite, cut up by ravines full of stunted trees. Beneath that again bare rocks alternated with thick and tangled jungle. Rising sheer to meet this were cliffs at least 500 feet high, and as we were not far off them they towered high above our mast-heads as we were swept along. What a dreadful, awesome, repulsive bay that was! Although it was by then about ten o'clock, and the sky was blue overhead, the sun had not risen above the line of the cliff-tops and they were in deep shadow.

Enmeshed in a maze of foaming sea, the barque was being literally hurtled along. In the main her line of drift seemed to be almost parallel with the coast, but an under-current setting her inshore must have been increasing in strength; for she was rapidly approaching the bases of the cliffs round which the sea piled high in masses of spray and foam. It seemed, indeed, to be rushing up their faces to a height of well over a hundred feet. It appeared to be lashing itself into a perfect frenzy of hate. Along the shore there was a wildly distorted riot of subdued colours—sombre black rollers with translucent green tops; long, thick, trailing yellow kelp; dazzling white surf licking up black cliffs. As those rollers thundered and broke they gave me the impression that their terrific impact was actually shaking the solid cliffs.

The noise they made was almost deafening, but above it could be heard the raucous cries of thousands of sea-birds, disturbed by the close approach to their resting places of this strange monster. My memory of those awful moments is a confused one of loud, bewildering noises; of stillness in the air, save for the birds; of wild movement in the sea; of sheer helplessness against a background of deadly peril. Now the hands shuffled nervously, and I felt myself shuffling like them. I did not want to get any closer to that hideous welter; when would the captain give the order to lower the boats? I went along the poop and joined that calm pillar of strength, the mate, and as I did so the captain spoke to him. "I'm going below to get ready, mister," he said grimly.

"To get ready to leave her," the mate explained to me. "Heavens! I wish we could *do* something!"

It seemed that he *had* been doing something; he had been taking compass bearings of a long, wicked-looking ledge of rock at which he now stared intently. He had decided from the line of her drift that it was on that ledge the barque would bring up. "Look at that drift-wood eddying in the foam round it," he said to confirm his idea. "Now watch that huge tree."

The tree was a veritable giant of the forest and must have been torn out of the ground by a recent hurricane; for it had its huge spreading roots, clogged with earth and stones, still attached to it. It was floating low in the sea, as if waterlogged,



and was setting straight toward the ledge. As we watched, it stopped suddenly and was up-ended. The roots, which must have weighed tons, were thrown right out of the water, and a few seconds later it surged, rolling over and over, a full fifty yards to seaward. Fascinated, we stared at it. It made two more attempts to reach the ledge and failed; it simply could not reach the ledge.

"*That* could happen to us," the mate said. "That tree, with its roots, must be drawing more water than we are. There's an off-set close inshore, and a terrific backwash as well. Must be!"

The captain, and Sidney, came up through the companionway carrying two chronometers and a suitcase with the ship's papers. He looked around sadly, and I could well understand the bitterness of his thoughts. His lovely barque was to be abandoned and left to pound to pieces on those terrible rocks. "We can't afford to wait any longer, mister; lower away," he said. "If this weather holds we might make Good Success Bay. It's only a few miles from here, and there's often a sealer anchored there."

"I don't think we should lower the boats, sir," the mate replied.

"Eh! what's that?" the captain demanded.

"There's a very strong backwash in there, sir. We've been watching that tree and it can't get near the beach."

Somewhat astonished, the captain placed the chronometer he was carrying on the deck. "Are

you suggesting that I should gamble with men's lives on the information supplied by a *tree*?" he asked stiffly.

"It's the only reliable information we've got, sir," the mate retorted with equal stiffness. "Besides, we're too late; no boat would live in the surf that's running in here now."

Now the men on the main-deck were showing signs of panic, and who could blame them. Anyone could see that the shattering surf roaring on the ledge and leaping high up the face of the cliff would smash the stoutest ship to pieces in less than half an hour. Why didn't the old man give the order to lower the boats? I should not have been surprised if they had taken to them without orders—but now it was indeed too late. The *John Lockett's* port bilge was in the kelp; the spray from the cliffs was flying all over her; the sea-birds were swooping round the trucks and yard-arms. Men grabbed rails and other objects to brace themselves against the shock of impact—but she got no closer. A cushion of water held her up as firmly as if she had struck a sandbank. Swish! She was flung over violently to starboard till the main yard-arm dipped in the sea, and it was well that men were hanging on; then the backwash swept her, trembling, half a cable's length seaward. She came upright; and a faint cackle that was meant for a cheer came from parched throats.

"Vot vos de course, sir? She vos steerin' again!" the man at the wheel said.



Astounded, we raised our eyes aloft to find out what miracle had happened and saw that the tiny main royal—the highest sail of all—was bulging out merrily and tugging at its containing sheets. The rest of the canvas still hung limply. We looked over the side; some drift-wood was moving slowly aft. We looked ahead; the jib-boom was slowly swinging to starboard, as if the helmsman had instinctively put his wheel over to claw her off the beach. How we blessed the naval architect who had designed a vessel with lines so perfect that even a little royal full of wind could set her forging ahead with steerage way! The wind, which was just clearing the top of the cliff and blowing down at us, was on the port quarter, and so just right; for the yards had been hauled round when the barque was caught aback, and she was now heading to the eastward—towards the Atlantic again.

The fore royal and half the main topgallant-sail filled, and the headway gradually increased; we were perceptibly edging seawards. As we stood around, somewhat dazed with relief, there was a diversion; wild yells came from aft to shock anew our jangled nerves. All hands stared astern, and there in the wake, now flung high on the crest of the swells, now disappearing between them, were three long canoes. Each frail craft held three savages, naked though the temperature was at freezing point; and of those, two sat in the bows and sterns of the canoes plying broad paddles,

the others stood amidships, balancing themselves and brandishing long bows to which arrows were fitted. To say that their dramatic appearance had astonished us would be a gross understatement; there was not a man on board from the captain downward whose mouth was not gaping wide open.

The savages looked a wild lot. Their skins were a light coffee colour; their hair was long, black and straight, and they looked extremely muscular. The men at the bows and sterns were paddling hard, and for a time the canoes seemed to gain on us; then the topgallant-sails filled with wind and we gradually drew away from them. After a minute or two they seemed to realise that we had the heels of them, for they uttered a deep, combined yell, turned their canoes, and made back for the shelter of the headland to the westward. I do not believe that, with their frail canoes, they were out to attack what must have seemed a huge vessel to them; though at that time the Indians of Tierra del Fuego had a bad reputation for treachery and for assaulting shipwrecked crews. It was more likely that they were out to fish and shoot—but, all the same, none of us was sorry to see them go.

It was then, while we were still partially stunned by the dramatic appearance of the Indians, and by our narrow escape from drowning—if indeed we *had* escaped, for we were still close inshore—that there occurred a repetition of the entertainment provided on the poop just after we had nearly been



sent to the bottom by the cross-Channel steamer ; and it was the inquisitive Sidney who started it. " Sir," he said to the mate, " would those savages we saw have been cannibals ? "

The mate rose to it like a trout at a mayfly. " Yes, Sidney, my boy," he said gravely, " all the Indians of Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia are cannibals, and they would have welcomed us—you especially. Being young and tender, they would have roasted you, whereas a tough old bird like me they would have to boil or stew."

Unfortunately at that moment the captain joined us. " Mister," he said reprovingly, " you are giving the boy information which is entirely wrong, and which he might well repeat elsewhere. It is true that Charles Darwin declared all the natives of these parts to be cannibals, but that statement has been refuted and has no foundation in fact ; though those suffering from incurable diseases are frequently put to death. The men we saw in those canoes were undoubtedly Yogans ; and missionaries who have reduced their language to writing assert that it contains at least thirty thousand words ; though the numerals stop at five, and the same word expresses both hand and finger."

It was really amazing at such a time to find a man who was not only eager to argue about natives, but also to back up his arguments by quotations from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The mate shrugged his shoulders. " Well, sir, it really doesn't matter," he said. " By the time we'd been rolled

a hundred feet or so up and down the face of those cliffs a few times, our bodies would have been unfit for human consumption."

The captain looked at him sharply, as if suspicious that he was having his leg pulled; but the mate's face was as devoid of expression as a boot. Further trouble was avoided by the man at the wheel repeating timidly that he would like a course to steer. This brought us all to our senses; nearly all the sails had filled, the barque was moving ahead sharply, and the helmsman on his own initiative was steering her toward the middle of the strait. The captain looked along the coast, then at the compass. "Keep her east-south-east," he said gruffly.

East-south-east! We were retreating, heading back toward the Atlantic! As the captain and Sidney went down the companionway carrying the chronometers, the mate winked at me. "I guess that's the last time he'll poke her jib-boom into the Straits of Le Maire," he said.

With the favouring wind we sped past Cape St John, at the eastern end of Staten Island, and when we had a good offing brought her to the wind. Close hauled on the starboard tack, and steering by the wind, the best course she could make was south-west—south-west towards the Antarctic ice, with Cape Horn itself still far away to the westward and the bitter prospect of weeks of cruel and weary battling ahead of us.



## VII.

Frequent squalls, heavily laden with hail, did nothing to dispel the gloom during the next few hours ; but the old man hung on grimly to his canvas, and we still had all sail set when the miraculous thing happened. During the afternoon the barque had been breaking off as the wind kept shifting ahead, and we were actually heading to the eastward of south when the captain decided to go on the other tack. We went about at the end of the first dog-watch, at six o'clock, and by half past six we were, almost unbelievably, steering compass course with the wind abaft the port beam. Very nice ; but, of course, it could not last ! A. midnight, however, when I relieved the mate, we were still running free, doing close on ten knots in the right direction. " Keep your fingers crossed, young fellow," the mate said as he went below.

I did, and when he came on deck again at four o'clock I had the satisfaction of handing over a barque still running free and eating up the miles to the westward. We ran like that all through the night and the next day ; and during the early afternoon dark-blue dots appeared on the horizon to the north-west. Soon the most westerly of the dots stood out clear of the others and it developed into an island some five miles long—a precipitous, snow-capped little island of bare rugged rock. It was the grim sentinel of the Southern Ocean itself,

silhouetted against the rosy pink light left in the sky by the setting sun ; and we were passing it some three miles off. The captain called the two apprentices and Sidney on to the poop and addressed them in his best professional manner. " Boys," he said, after a dry preliminary cough, "*that* is the famous Cape Horn. Hundreds of thousands of seamen have passed around it, and I may say, ahem ! have cursed it ; few have actually seen it."

Sidney's eyes bulged like door knobs. He knew this was no leg-pull ; though the captain had actually tried to be funny, for once. Deeply interested, we gazed at that incredibly dreary, lonely outpost with its vague background of snow-lad archipelago. The captain continued, and became more eloquent when he noticed that the mate and I had added ourselves to his class. " As you see, it is an island, not a cape as is generally supposed. It is named after the town of Hoorn, in West Friesland, the home-town of Le Maire, the Dutch captain who discovered the strait in which we so nearly came—er—the strait through which we passed yesterday. That will do."

Suitably impressed, the boys went off. Said the mate to me, " He's right—this time. *I* have passed the blasted place fifteen times without seeing it ; and, to tell you the honest truth, I never want to see it again."

I had the watch from eight o'clock till midnight, and a more perfect night I have rarely known. The wind was from the south-east, and moderate ;



the air was cold and frosty, but as clear as a bell; a full moon rode high along the lee beam, with hardly a cloud passing over it. It was the 21st June, mid-winter day. With the wind abaft the port beam, every sail was set and drawing, and the *John Lockett* was gliding along in that noiseless manner characteristic of a fine-lined sailing-ship in a moderate breeze; heeling over, but not rolling; slipping smoothly through the sea, with the foam which her sharp bows had created sparkling as it raced past her sides.

The lee sides of the sails gleamed white in the moonlight, their reverse sides were in shadow and dark shadows were cast on the deck, gleaming with frost, and on the moonlit sea to windward. As I paced up and down, keeping a careful eye aloft for any sign of a change of wind, scraps of subdued conversation reached me from the sailors clustered on the main-deck about the break of the poop. They represented most of the Nordic races, but they were speaking English to each other. I could see the puffs of what looked like white steam caused by their breathing as it impinged on the keen air.

Occasionally they paused in their talk and looked up to the poop where I was keeping my watch. They were all older than I was, and probably considered themselves wiser; and I felt they were wondering whether I knew what I was doing carrying every stitch of canvas, even if the wind *was* steady and moderate, on a winter night in what

was reputed to be the stormiest tract of water in the world. They would stare to windward, then look aloft to where the tiny royals, bulging out gracefully to the breeze, were tugging at their sheets. I verily believe that they looked upon this carrying of royals off the pitch of the Horn as sacrilege.

The watch wore on and I was left to keep it undisturbed; the captain had gone below at nine o'clock, after telling me to call him if there was any change in either the strength or direction of the wind, and had not come up again. After midnight I lingered for a little part of my precious watch below talking with the mate, and asked him if he thought this fair wind could possibly last. "I believe it might—touch wood—for the glass is high and the weather looks anti-cyclonic," he answered, rubbing his hand along the broad teakwood rail, "and if it does for two days we'll be as good as round the Horn!"

I came on deck again at four o'clock. The moon was now on the lee bow and considerably nearer the horizon, but apart from that there was no change. The wind had been steady throughout; they had not touched a brace during the watch, the mate said. And the wind remained like that, not for two days but for seven, and by the end of that time we did not very much care what it did; for we were in Valparaiso Bay!

We had sighted the land just after dawn on a clear morning. Under the arching foot of the fore-



sail there appeared that remarkable promontory, Curauma Head, a distinctive sign-post to vessels approaching Valparaiso from the southward. As the captain studied it carefully through his telescope (for mistakes are easily made on that coast) any doubt was soon dispelled; for behind it there appeared the serrated summit of the Campana de Quillota, 6200 feet high. This made our position certain, and course was altered for Punta Curamilla, at the entrance to Valparaiso Bay, four miles to the west-north-west. For accuracy our landfall could hardly have been surpassed, and it was quickly followed by impressive grandeur; for hardly had we settled on our new course than the clouds to the eastward rolled away, revealing the peaks of the Andes. The passing of the last cloud unveiled the giant volcano Aconcagua, easily distinguishable by its superior height of 23,000 feet above sea level.

Thrill followed thrill on this last stage of our sea passage, and perhaps the greatest thrill of all was due to the appearance of a mere lighthouse—a man-made lighthouse which represented civilisation again. It stood on Punta Curamilla; and beside it was a Lloyd's signal station with telephonic communication to Valparaiso. The news of our safe arrival would soon be cabled to London!

The men who manned that lighthouse and the signal station were accustomed to wonderful panoramas of shipping. Mail steamers, tramp steamers, and sailing-vessels of all rigs, from great five-masted

barques like the French *La France* and the German *Patosi*, downward, frequently passed that way. (The giant five-masted, full-rigged ship *Preussen*, mortally stricken in 1910 by a cross-Channel steamer which, trusting to high speed, tried to cross her bows and failed, was yet to come.) Yes, the men on Punta Curamilla had seen, and were still seeing at that time, some wonderful spectacles; but I doubt if they ever saw anything more beautiful than our own *John Lockett* when, carrying all her sails, she swayed in past the point before the freshening sea breeze that bright morning. With the captain handling her as if she were a racing yacht, and indeed she was almost as handy, we stood in to the anchorage, shortening sail as we went, and came smoothly to an anchor.

It was then that I realised one of the disadvantages of being an officer. As I moved around the deck, giving an extra pull on a clewline here, slacking a buntline there, the hands far aloft furling canvas were feasting eyes hungry for the sight of land after months of empty sea and sky. They came down at last and were sent below for their mid-day meal; and just then the captain of the port and the coastguard came aboard. We felt almost abashed in their presence; for, with the exception of the naked Indians who had made such a dramatic appearance in the Straits of Le Maire, we had not seen a strange face since the tug left us off the mouth of the Tyne. The officials went down into the cabin to transact their business; and later



Sidney confessed he felt so shy that he wanted to run away and hide.

"The main thing is we're here," the mate said, while we waited on the poop for the cabin table to be cleared of papers so that we could get our meal; "but if it hadn't been for that truly amazing slant we got from the easterly wind off Staten Island we might still be battering about hundreds of miles to the south'ard of the Horn."

### VIII.

After the meal the captain went on shore, and while we waited for the Chilean pilot and a tug to put us into safe mooring, the mate pointed out the sights. Everywhere there was pulsating life, and much to admire, in that wonderful harbour.

In the south-western part of the bay sailing-ships were moored in lines; alongside them lay some units of the Chilean fleet. Beside the Fiscal Mole, on the west side of the bay, were a number of steamers, among them a great mail and passenger liner, belonging to the Pacific Steam Navigation Company, just arrived from England. Along the line of the mole were hydraulic cranes with tramways beside them and, as we watched, puffs of smoke came from an engine pulling a train away from the end of the mole toward the Baron railway station. Yes; we were actually watching a train!

Seen from the bay, Valparaiso certainly looked a

fine city, with some magnificent buildings, many of which the mate pointed out. There was the Balsa Commercial, a large and most imposing building with a tower at each end; it stood on the sea front, close to the landing jetty, and housed the Port Offices and the Circulo Naval; and the great Custom House was close to it. We could see the fine cathedral, which stood in one of the principal plazas, and the Anglican church on the Cerro Alegre, where also were the residences of the British and German merchants. I longed to do a bit of exploring. "We'll take a run out to Vina del Mar next Sunday afternoon," the mate promised.

The pilot came alongside with a tug and, after we had weighed anchor, shifted us across to one of the tiers, where we got on with the long, hard, and heavy job of making the vessel secure. Security was vital, for it was the season of the dreaded Northerers; and a northerly gale could turn that pleasant harbour of Valparaiso into a ghastly death-trap. The bay is open to the north, and a high dangerous sea rolls in. Badly secured or badly placed vessels are torn from their moorings and driven ashore; and the harbour is full of wreckage and sinking lighters. To be even reasonably safe, vessels in the tiers must be moored with long lengths of chain cable both ahead and astern.

As we worked I noticed with satisfaction that the captain had sent off a man from the ship-chandler's with a plentiful supply of meat and vegetables, which the cook and Sidney were receiving from him. Sidney caught my eye and grinned



delightedly ; there might be steak and chips, or pork chops, for supper—a nice change from the monotonous diet of salt or tinned meats. The cook engaged the ship-chandler's man in earnest conversation before the Chilean got back into his boat ; they would be arranging supplies for the next day, I supposed.

By five o'clock we were moored to the mate's satisfaction, and the weary hands were released ; the passage from the Tyne to Valparaiso had, officially, come to an end. The mate and I went below to enjoy a good wash, to take advantage of what was called a "free pump"—a plentiful supply of fresh water as opposed to the three quarts a day, for all purposes, to which we were strictly limited when at sea. The mate lingered in his room to shave, and I went on to the poop to find that the captain had returned from the shore. He was pacing fore and aft, simply purring with satisfaction and swelling with importance, but he unbent sufficiently to give me the news.

He had hardly entered the agent's office when he found himself being congratulated on having made the best passage of the year from the United Kingdom. Yes, our sixty-nine days from the Tyne right into Valparaiso had beaten all our rivals comfortably ; and a result that was particularly pleasing to the British shipmasters in the port was that we had beaten one of the famous German "P" ships, one of the fastest of the nitrate clippers, by a clear three days from the Lizard.

He had learned that it had been a terrible winter

off the Horn. No fewer than five vessels which should at that moment have been discharging at Valparaiso, were back at the Falklands, leaking and with extensive damage to masts and spars. One ship was missing, and indeed she never arrived. It seemed to me that the captain was inclined to take the sole credit for our wonderful passage, a claim which I was sure the mate would not endorse. Every time he approached the break of the poop, where I was standing, he had some fresh item of information to impart—one of them of international importance, which, however, he passed over lightly.

The sun was just about to set, and as the mate had warned me that no shore boat was allowed to ply for hire after sunset I was somewhat surprised to hear one come alongside ; and to see, a moment later, a man appear at the top of the accommodation ladder. It was the man with whom the cook had been dealing earlier in the afternoon, and after a furtive glance up at me, he set off for the galley, where I could see the cook waiting for him. While both of them stared aft, apparently to see what I was doing, the man drew a large bottle from under his cape, in the manner of a conspirator, and handed it to the cook—and at that very moment the captain reached the break of the poop at the end of one of his forward perambulations. He was on to the scene at the galley door like a knife.

"Did you see that, mister?" he shouted. "I will not have liquor smuggled aboard my ship, especially the vile fire-water they sell on this coast.



I shall talk severely to the cook, who is old enough to know better ; and I shall see to it that his Chilean friend never boards my ship again. Bring that bottle here immediately—I shall confiscate it.”

“ I don’t believe there is really any necessity for that, sir,” I said. “ I believe I know what is in that bottle.”

“ And pray, sir, what do you *believe* is in the bottle ? ” the captain demanded loftily.

“ Hair-dye, sir,” I answered.

## IX.

The discharging of British sailing-vessels on the coast was a very leisurely business ; with the French and Germans, especially the Germans, it was a matter of feverish haste ; they had the organisation. Feast days and surf days—and somehow the foreigners even seemed to have fewer of those than we had—did not count as lay days, so we had spells when not a single lighter came off to us.

We were five weeks in Valparaiso discharging 1100 tons, but we never managed to get to Vina del Mar. The mate actually wangled the trip for the last Sunday of our stay, when the old man was giving a party to some shore friends, at which we were not particularly wanted ; and on the Saturday night we got out our best suits, brushed the mildew off them, and refolded them neatly.

Next morning, eager as schoolboys, we rose bright and early, to find storm signals flying from the flagstaff of the harbour buildings; one of the dreaded Northers was believed to be approaching. In spite of the ugly, menacing appearance of the weather the Norther did not actually strike the bay, but the very threat of it kept us standing by and completely spoiled our day. It was little consolation to us that, with all traffic suspended in the harbour, the old man's party was effectually spoiled too. We sailed three days later; and quickly picking up the south-east trades, made a pleasant passage up the coast.

When we got to the great nitrate port of Iquique we found seventy sailing-vessels there; and with the exception of an American five-masted schooner, down from Puget Sound with lumber, and one or two Peruvian and Chilean coasting craft, all were square-rigged. At that time there was no steam tug at Iquique, and every one of those vessels had to enter and leave the port under sail; so we saw many stirring and beautiful sights. The memory of one of them will probably never leave me. One morning five great skyscraping masts and a tremendous far-spreading cloud of canvas came gliding between two tiers of moored ships; the record-breaking German barque *Potosi*, the largest sailing-vessel afloat, had arrived in Iquique. She came to an anchor some distance farther out, and from my position by the main-hatch, where I was guiding bags of nitrate down into the hold,



I could see her captain studying our barque through a telescope.

There was a reason why the great man took such an interest in us, and we got it from the ship-chandler, who also supplied the *Potosi*. He told us that when the captain of the famous nitrate clipper learned from the Valparaiso pilot, off Punta Curamilla, that a British barque had reported a passage from the Lizard three days better than his, he had gone clean off the deep end with fury, real Teutonic fury which even threatened the innocent Chilano pilot. Well, we had taken it out of her at sea; now she would take it out of us in port. We were heaving up single bags of nitrate from the lone lighter alongside with a dolly-winch; she had four lighters abreast of each hatch, and all her winches, supplied with steam from her donkey boiler, clattered steadily. Within ten days she had loaded 11,000 tons; and by the time we had got our 1100 tons under hatches she was round the Horn and well up into the South Atlantic.

It may be remembered that it was curiosity about the stowage of nitrate cargoes that first took me on board the *John Lockett* and was thus the cause of my making the voyage in her. For me the conundrum had been solved in Aberdeen; now that I was actually taking part in the operation it was the truly amazing performance put up by the solitary Chilean stevedore that impressed me more than anything. He was a small, wizened man, yet he carried every one of the 400-lb. bags

of nitrate from the square of the hatch into which it was lowered, and deposited it into its final position. One day after the mid-day meal, while the hands were having their smokes, the most powerful member of the crew, a Norwegian, got one of the bags on to his shoulder with the help of two of his shipmates, and proceeded to stagger along the deck with it, proud of his strength. By the time he had gone ten yards he was sagging at the knees; after another yard the bag slipped to the deck. His shipmates jeered; the little Chilano, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, just smiled indulgently, and braced himself for another spell down in the hold.

In a most tantalising manner the nitrate dribbled off; a lighter-load one day, perhaps two the next, or none at all. One shiny day succeeded another shiny day—it had not rained in Iquique for ten years—the monotony of existence out in the bay broken by the arrival or departure of ships; the heat of the sun tempered by the south-east trade wind. We got loaded in time, and before daybreak one morning unmoored and stood out into the South Pacific, bound for Falmouth for orders. We came round the Horn without trouble, but, of course, we expected that when homeward bound; and a fine weather passage to Falmouth Bay followed. After two days at anchor we received orders to proceed to Dundee, and we passed up the North Sea just as easily as we had passed down it.

The *John Lockett* was like that; she was the



sort of vessel in which nothing seemed to go wrong. Everything flowed smoothly, and presently you found you were there. True the outward passage had been marred by those two ugly incidents, but then, as the mate, her devoted lover, said, one could not blame her for either of them. The first was due to an error of judgment on the part of an arrogant Belgian shipmaster; the other to the obstinacy of a pig-headed British one who could not keep away from the Straits of Le Maire.

In Dundee, just round the corner from the port where I joined her, I said farewell to that flower of a barque—and to sail!

## HAZARD IN THE WAIHORA

### I.

AFTER a spell of dry land—studying and school-mastering in a navigation school—I became restless ; I was not getting out of the rut. I had studied hard all the time and greatly added to my nautical knowledge. I had obtained certificates from South Kensington in such subjects as Navigation, Nautical and Spherical Astronomy, in which I had taken honours, and Advanced Naval Architecture. All of those were most valuable from an educational point of view, but there was one qualification I lacked. Although still young, I had held a square-rigged extra-master's certificate for three years—but I had never actually commanded a vessel, and that put me out of the running for responsible positions in, for instance, the Board of Trade or Lloyd's, which I might otherwise have aspired to.

Obviously the remedy was to get command, but how ? To go back to sea, get into some company and wait for promotion, seemed to be the solution ; but in reality it did not quite work out in that way. Promotion in any good company was likely to be slow ; for instance, to anticipate, it took my pal, Jack Boag, twenty years to get command in



the Clan Line—though I must admit that this was aggravated by serious losses among ships in the 1914-1918 war—and by the time I had eventually put in a year as master I would not only be too old, but would have forgotten much of what I had learned. The real solution came from a friend who was home on leave from Singapore. "Go out to the Straits, learn the Malay language, keep your nose clean, and you'll get command in less than two years," he advised.

The advice was sound. The vessel I might get command of out there was not likely to be a very superior one, but it was the qualification I was after; she would probably be coasting, but while coasting in this country counted for nothing but a home trade certificate, out there it would rank as foreign service. That was how, in 1904, I found myself chief officer of the s.s. *Waihora* of Penang.

The *Waihora* was no ordinary vessel; indeed in her day she had been one of the finest steamers in the Southern hemisphere. She had been built on the Clyde for the mail and passenger service of the Union Company of New Zealand, and was one of the crack ships of their fleet. She was a handsome vessel, too; down there her hull had been painted dark green above pink boot topping, and her funnel red with a black top; her boats and all her upper-works were white—and she was kept in perfect condition. At sea her spotless decks were usually crowded with gaily-dressed passengers attended by white-clad stewards, and

her brasswork, of which she had plenty, was kept perfectly burnished—but if one of those passengers had come across her in Penang he or she would have found recognition difficult; for she was now a coolie ship.

About a year before I joined her she had been bought by the Koe Guan Company, of Penang, for their China trade, and ruthlessly altered to provide accommodation for hordes of Chinese deck passengers. One very large, handsome, walnut-panelled saloon down in the 'tween-decks had been torn out of her altogether. Another handsome but slightly smaller saloon under the poop had not been so severely handled, but it was used entirely by Chinese and soon reeked of opium and crowded humanity. Only the spacious smoking-room on the poop was left for the sole use of the ship's officers as a saloon, and it, like the large poop on which it stood in splendid isolation, was kept scrupulously clean. A better arrangement could hardly have been desired; and by way of a light flying bridge, running fore and aft, we could get to the lower bridge and thence to the bridge itself without going down on the main-deck.

The hull still looked shapely, though no longer green—as the funnel was no longer red. All were now a sombre black, and the name in large yellow Chinese letters on bow and stern, under the English one, proclaimed the ownership; though, of course, she flew the Red Ensign. Changed, too, was the dazzling white paintwork of the superstructure and



the boats ; and the brasswork no longer glittered. All was drab—and for that I was mainly responsible. As chief officer it was my duty to see to the vessel's cleanliness, and the idea of keeping all that white paintwork clean, with the decks packed with Chinese of the coolie class, quite frankly frightened me. I persuaded the captain to arrange for me to have a heart-to-heart talk with the Marine Superintendent, who was an engineer, and after an hour of earnest argument he agreed.

After all, as I pointed out, paint is applied to woodwork to preserve it, and to ironwork to save it from rust, and for those purposes paint that would not show the dirt was just as good as white. The *Waihora* was booked for three trips to Moulmein, and during those trips she would not be carrying passengers. It was a splendid chance to alter the colour scheme and I seized it eagerly. I had all the boats, deckhouses, bulwarks and rails painted a sort of dark khaki colour ; not a bit of white paintwork remained. I even took an impish delight in having paint slapped on all brasswork—not that it required paint to preserve it, but to save labour ; it took a man a whole morning to polish one binnacle cover.

It was my first visit to that pleasant land of pagodas, Burma, in which I afterwards spent a number of very happy years, and I enjoyed those trips to Moulmein. By the time we were ready to leave Penang for our regular run to China the *Waihora*, if no longer shining like a yacht, presented

a wholesome, workmanlike appearance. I remember feeling flattered when told that all the vessels in the company, nearly forty of them, were to be painted in the same colours; which seems to show that I was much more susceptible to flattery in those days than I am now.

There were many much finer vessels on the China coast, but I doubt if there was a happier one—even though we were only seven Europeans all told. To my mind Captain Daniel was the ideal shipmaster. Only a few years older than I, he had been a Penang pilot before going down to New Zealand to bring the *Waihora* to Penang, with the result that he was an expert at handling vessels in narrow waters. To see him manœuvring the *Waihora* in crowded roadsteads like Penang, Singapore, and Hong Kong was an education. He always had his pipe between his teeth on such occasions, and he was always cool and unruffled.

I never wished to sail with a better captain or finer navigator, and to him the happy state of affairs in the *Waihora* was mainly due, though we all fitted in well. He had gone to the Penang Pilot Service from a passenger steamer in which he was chief officer, and was popular socially. A good horseman, he had ridden the winners of steeplechases on the Penang racecourse; he had a fine voice and could sing a good song; and he could play the piano like a professional. I fancy his reason for taking command of the *Waihora* was the same that in the old days caused many officers



of the Indian Army to seek temporary service in such corps as the Burma Military Police—to enable him to retrench, settle his debts, and set his economy on an even keel.

As I have mentioned, there were six Europeans, besides the captain, in the *Waihora*—two deck officers and four engineer officers; and a more perfect refutation of the old adage that oil and water will not mix, I have never known. The second officer, a very nice, well-mannered lad, was a little younger than I was; the chief engineer was somewhat older. On a coast which, at that time, was rather notorious for hard drinking, we were all abstemious. The men before the mast and the stokehold crew were Cantonese; good, hard-working men they were, and my right-hand man, the boatswain, was a very fine seaman.

A most important man in the *Waihora*—as in most Chinese ships, since they were usually members of the owner's family and held shares—was the *chinchew*, or supercargo. The *chinchew* had everything to do with the passengers and cargo, and had a large staff, all of whom lived in the saloon under the poop. The maintenance of something like order among the deck passengers was, in itself, a tremendous job, requiring a number of interpreters skilled in the many dialects of the passengers we carried. Except to the deck and engine-room crews, the *chinchew* was the most important man on board; but in the end discipline everywhere depended on the prestige of the white man. Each one of us

had a loaded revolver in a locked drawer in his cabin, but I never knew them to be displayed.

Each officer in the *Waihora* had a Chinese servant, and I was particularly fortunate in mine. He was a young Hylam, and only a year or so before had been running wild round the jungle of Hainan. He had been caught and tamed, then handed over to our chief steward, who started in to train him for the job he was doing now. He was keen and intelligent, and his black eyes would sparkle when he did something that earned him praise. He was learning English, and soon knew what to call every object in my cabin and every article in my wardrobe. I never knew his outlandish name, but merely called him "Boy" in the usual fashion, till one day he supplied himself with a nickname.

While lying in Moulmein I came along the deck one morning to find him staring, his eyes bulging and with open-mouthed astonishment, at a large elephant. It was strolling majestically along the bank, presumably on its way to its work in one of the teak yards. "Hullo! what thing?" I asked him.

I thought I had him stumped; but the animal had struck some chord in his memory. I am certain he had never seen an elephant before, but he must have seen a picture of one or had one described to him. For a time he stood struggling to get the right word, then he blurted out, "B'long Jumbo!"

From that day he was Jumbo to all the officers, and to his own pals as well. Transparently honest from his large feet to his open, ever-ready smile,



Jumbo was always willing, and I never had a better servant.

It pleased us to consider the *Waihora* a liner, and certainly she had a regular run—from Penang southwards to Singapore, then northwards to Hai-How in the island of Hainan, to Hong Kong, Swatow and Amoy in China. When at last we steamed out of Penang we had three or four hundred passengers ; but more, many more, were to follow later !

## II.

When, a little under a week later, we passed the Horsburgh Lighthouse at the eastern end of the Malacca Straits, and swung north into the South China Sea, it was painfully obvious that we had not forgotten what we had called at Singapore for. Officially there were nearly two thousand Chinese on board ; but I was under the impression that there were at least five hundred more.

The wind was light ; the sea was calm ; the yellow people swarmed everywhere—on the fore-castle-head, on the lower bridge, all round the main-deck. They were all over the boats ; some of the bolder spirits were lined like roosting hens on top of the derricks, which lay, horizontal, in their crutches well above the level of the awnings that covered the main-deck, fore and aft. Anywhere for air. The bridge and the poop with our saloon on it, stood up like islets in a chattering

sea of yellow humanity, and we took care they were not invaded. There was hardly a square yard of vacant space anywhere else ; and, worse still, there was what might be called a second layer of it ; for the 'tween-deck, just below the main-deck, was packed in the same way.

I doubt if there are noisier people on earth than the Chinese, particularly those of the coolie class, and throughout most of the twenty-four hours some of them were shrieking and yelling. Even if sitting side by side they shouted at each other ; what sounded like deadly insults were probably only friendly invitations to gambling parties—and how they gambled ! Games of *poh* or *fan-tan* began with the rising of the sun and continued till it set. Often the high-pitched conversation would be broken by the staccato ringing of bells, sounding like telephone bells, which puzzled me till I discovered what caused it. Many of those people, having fulfilled contracts in the Straits or Malaya, were moderately rich and carried bundles of dollars with them. These were stowed away in brass-bound camphor-wood boxes, all fitted with bell attachments which rang a warning when the lids were raised. Even then they took no chances ; at least one of the family sat tight on the baggage, night and day.

Occasionally during my watch on the bridge, the sea being empty so that there was nothing to watch, I amused myself studying one family through a break in the continuity of the canvas awning



which they were sitting under, and since they did not know I was watching, they were perfectly natural. I loved to watch the tiny tots dexterously manipulating their chop-sticks. The meal never varied ; it consisted of a large bowl of rice, supplied by the *chinchew's* gang, for each family, and a small bowl of vegetables for each person. They were cheerful people, for they were homeward-bound ; and I noticed they were very kind to their children, especially the male ones. Both on deck and in the 'tween-deck the men, who were stripped to the waist, perspired freely, while the women, who wore shiny stiff black tunics and trousers, always looked cool. Usually they ate sitting on their baggage, certainly not far away from it.

Sometimes, as I stood on the bridge and looked along the packed decks that resembled human ant-heaps, and reflected that there were just as many human ants below as I could see on the top, I doubted if, for instance, the heads of families would have been quite so happy and cheerful if they had known, what was undoubtedly true, that there was not accommodation either in lifeboats or rafts for all the people on board. It was a subject which, by tacit consent, we avoided, for it did not bear thinking about. Constant vigilance was the answer, and certainly it sharpens a man's wits, his eyesight, and his hearing, when he knows that a few moments after a violent collision or stranding he may find himself one of a few sane

men trying to cope with some thousands of yellow lunatics suddenly driven insane by blind, unreasoning panic.

One did not require a very powerful imagination to picture a scene of unspeakable horror ; indeed one knew, for it had already happened in those waters. Such boats as could be swung out would be rushed and the davit falls cut. The boats would be swamped as soon as they reached the water even if they were not smashed on the way down. Men who had managed to struggle on to floating rafts would be murdered and thrown back into the water to make room for others who were stronger. The sea alongside would be alive with coughing, splashing swimmers who would eventually cease to struggle—and sharks soon gather round in that part of the South China Sea. On the decks women and children would be trampled to death under the heavy mass of bewildered humanity enclosed by the bulwarks.

No, it was better not to speak of these things, not even to think of them, if one could avoid it ; but during the next four days we suffered from a suppressed nervous strain, and watched the barometer fearfully, for the typhoon season in the China Sea was well advanced. How ardently I longed for the moment when from the bridge Captain Daniel would shout to me the order " Let go ! " and the anchor would splash into Hai-How Roads, and so enable us to get rid of at least half the passengers !

It was about noon on the fifth day out from



Singapore that we brought up in the open roadstead, and I had barely time for a glance at the flat coast and the densely wooded mountain chain behind it before pandemonium broke out and I found that we were surrounded by a veritable armada. Native craft of all sorts—junks, lorchas, sampans, large and small—had come off to welcome the returned exiles, and the welcome began when they were still half a mile away. Lungs which must have been made of leather opened at that range, and the volume of sound did not diminish with proximity. The joy the arrival of our passengers occasioned was only equalled by the joy their departure brought to us.

At that time the *Waihora* was the only vessel to run directly from Singapore to Hai-How, and since the majority of house servants in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States were Chinese from Hainan, it is little wonder she was crowded on her passages. The capital, Kung-chou-fu, was about three and a half miles from the port, and it seemed to us that every soul of its 500,000 inhabitants had come to welcome a relative back to the island.

Four hours after we anchored the *chinchew* reported to Captain Daniel that the last of the Hai-How passengers had disembarked. Over a thousand had gone, yet when I looked along the main-deck from our sanctuary, the poop, I could have sworn that their departure had made no difference. I mentioned this to the second officer, and he supplied

Suez and Yokohama than the light-blue funnel with black top of Alfred Holt of Liverpool, the well-known Blue Funnel Line. One of their vessels was lying at anchor off our starboard bow—a real aristocrat of the sea. Tier upon tier of spotless white bridges and other erections rose above her freshly painted black-and-red hull. Along her lower bridge deck white boats lay in serried ranks. The derricks were down and lying in their crutches in exact parallel lines; not a rope-yarn seemed to be out of position. Black smoke poured from her massive funnel, and the Blue Peter flew at her fore truck. Her uniformed hands were at stations, the officers in white ducks. A magnificent vessel she was; a credit to the Red Ensign that hung over her stern and the blue-and-white house flag at her main truck.

A deep, prolonged, ear-splitting blast was blown on her steam whistle, and the Blue Peter came fluttering down from the truck; her anchor was a-weigh. While we were still a cable-length distant off her port quarter, the thing happened that our captain had been waiting for. The wash from the propeller churned under her counter. Slowly and majestically she moved off to the eastward, making for the pass known as the Lye-e-mun, and the *Waihora* sheered very neatly into the place she had vacated. We had picked up one of the best berths in the harbour—right off the Praya, out of the strength of the current and less than half a mile from the shore.



There was not the same mad rush of disembarking passengers here as at Hai-How. Hong Kong was a civilised port, with rules and regulations that had to be obeyed or the Harbour Police would want to know why. Only a given number of boats were allowed alongside at one time, and disembarkation went smoothly. By noon we had got rid of our Hong Kong passengers, most of whom were bound for Canton, and a little later the few who were supposed to be going with us to Amoy also left. As it would take us five or six days to discharge our Hong Kong cargo, the *chinchew* had arranged for them to be taken on by another Chinese-owned steamer. What a relief! The ship was our own again; we could walk freely around the decks; it was no longer like being in a gigantic rugger scrum.

From the magnificent harbour facing the capital, Victoria, the general aspect of Hong Kong is one of singular beauty. On the Peak, which lies to the south-west of the town and reaches an altitude of 1825 feet, there is a signal station which signals the approach of vessels, and it must be one of the busiest signal stations in the world. So animated was the harbour, so full of interesting sights, that we had been at anchor four days before I thought of going ashore. Then one afternoon I went off in the sampan that was attached to the ship and landed on the Praya. It was hot in the main commercial street, which runs inland parallel with the esplanade, so I decided to move upwards.

Ten minutes' climb up the side of the island took me to Government House and other public buildings, and there I found beautifully laid out gardens, both public and private, and solidly constructed roads. I loafed about, glad of the change from the ship, delighted with the flowers, the bamboos, and other delicately fronded trees. It was deliciously fresh and cool up there, away from the rattling of winches and the yelling of cargo coolies. I could see the *Waihora* down in the harbour with slings of rice in bags swinging outward at the heads of her derricks and being deposited into the lighters alongside; and I felt like a child suddenly transported from a London slum to the green fields of the country. When I made my way down again in the warm twilight I felt refreshed in body and mind—and happy in the knowledge that I would be up that way once more during our stay in Hong Kong; for the following evening the captain and I were to dine with friends of his who had a large house well up on the Peak. Next morning we would leave for Amoy.

I had noticed the captain's servant going into my cabin once or twice during the forenoon, so was not exactly surprised when I went in to dress to find that the raw, inexperienced Jumbo had made a perfect job of laying out my dress clothes. My dinner jacket, neatly folded, lay on the settee; not a stud or link was missing from my dress shirt. The sun was just drawing down behind Green Island when I joined the captain at the gangway,



and what a sunset that was! The Peak was being flooded by a strong unnatural light, and houses and barracks were standing out with a weird distinctness as if being viewed through a giant kaleidoscope. The scene was impressive but bizarre, and it seemed as if the whole island had suddenly drawn closer. Seamen usually distrust anything extraordinary in the appearance of sea or sky, and though the captain said nothing as we went down the accommodation ladder into the waiting sampan, I saw him cock a suspicious eye at the Peak as we proceeded shoreward.

One of the most important of the various Chinese communities in Hong Kong was that of the Tankas, the boat people or floating population. Almost every sea-going vessel which entered the port hired a large sailing sampan to be in attendance, and the majority of those sampans were owned and commanded by women, of whom something like eighty per cent answered to the name of Mary—Sampan Mary. The first time I had used this particular sampan I had taken the liberty of calling the owner Mary, to be informed, with considerable hauteur, that the name was Sarah. It had been bestowed on her by one of her patrons, a captain in the P. & O., so who could either dispute or criticise!

Sarah could certainly handle her craft in all weathers, either under sail or oars, in a seamanlike manner, and she was a competent business woman. In her uniform, which consisted of tunic and trousers of a black silk-like material and a huge hat which

resembled an umbrella, she was an impressive figure, and she maintained strict discipline on board her little craft. Any member of her crew had only to give her a sour or defiant half-insubordinate glance to receive a wallop with the first thing that came handy—rope's end or boat-hook, it was all the same to Sarah when she was exercising parental control; and here it must be mentioned that the boat was manned entirely by the members of her own family. Her eldest son, a bright lad of fifteen, was the chief officer, and the crew was composed of other sons and daughters, including an infant who should have been in arms, but spent most of his time tethered by a piece of coir rope to the mast, with two ducks and a particularly demonstrative black-tongued chow puppy.

There was a light breeze blowing offshore when we shoved off, but Sarah cleverly luffed her way through the shipping and soon had us alongside the Praya. "My thinkee wantchee sampan half-past ten, Sarah," Captain Daniel said.

"Al'ite, al'ite," Sarah replied.

We walked up to the station beside Murray Barracks and boarded the cable tramway.

It was my first trip and I was tremendously impressed by the steepness of the climb. I found myself subconsciously adopting the same attitude as some of the more nervous passengers, who were leaning heavily uphill as if afraid that the whole tramway would suddenly be tossed backwards down the slope. Occasionally they would rise to



get off the tram at one of the small stations *en route* and then the posturing would become really grotesque.

It was a glorious night with almost a full moon, and when we reached the house we lingered in the garden looking down at the harbour. Everything seemed to stand out with the same unnatural distinctness that we had noticed at sunset, and there was a similar illusion of nearness. Stationary lights twinkled everywhere, from the windows of the houses across at Kowloon to the riding-lights of the packed ships in Victoria Bay. White, red, and green lights of tugs and launches moved among the shipping, and I remember one brilliantly lit ferry steamer that seemed so close I felt I had only to run a few hundred yards down the hill to touch it. It was a most fantastic spectacle, and fascinating, too; though I had an eerie feeling that it contained a definite menace.

A very pleasant evening followed. We had an excellent dinner, followed by two delightful hours of music and singing. I did not sing, of course; a topsail halliard chanty was my limit, and I knew it; but I put in some very good listening. Captain Daniel positively scintillated, while one of our host's charming daughters was an accomplished violinist. The time passed all too quickly, and I was really sorry when the captain announced that if we wanted to keep our appointment with Sarah it was time to make for the tramway. When we got outside we found a change in the weather;

it was much darker, and though we could still see the lights of the shipping the captain was quick to notice that those over at Kowloon were being blotted out as if by mist or fine rain every few minutes, then shining brightly again. "I don't like this, one little bit," he remarked.

I did not like it either, but thought he was referring to the chance of a wetting, whereas he was thinking of something that was vastly more important. Just as we got off the tram we were accosted by a Chinese youth carrying a lantern. It was the chief officer of our sampan, and he promptly explained his mission. "Sarah makee talkee more better you go back to ship one time," he said.

"I think so, too," the captain said to me. "Come on, let's step out."

With the lantern bobbing ahead of us we made good time along the Praya, and as we clambered aboard the sampan Sarah ordered her youthful crew to let go the painter and shove the bow off. "What's all the hurry, Sarah?" Captain Daniel asked.

"My thinkie big typhoon come quick," Sarah answered.

"Truly, great minds think alike, Sarah," Captain Daniel said solemnly. "My thinkie same like."

With such experienced mariners in complete agreement it was obvious that the menace of an approaching typhoon brooded over Hong Kong.



## IV.

At that moment there was almost a dead calm, and Sarah's young deck-hands had to use oars instead of the sails they loved. I would not have blamed them for resentment, for it was sultry and oppressive, but it was Sarah with whom they had to deal and they made very good time out to the *Waihora*. Sarah followed us up the accommodation ladder and on to the lower bridge. "What thing typhoon-pigeon glass makee talkee?" she asked.

She meant the barometer, and she was answered by a worried-looking second officer who came down off the bridge with the key of the chart-room in his hand.

"The glass has dropped to twenty-nine point two, sir," he reported.

"*Twenty-nine point two!*" repeated the startled captain. "And here's the rain."

"*Hi-yah*, the gun!" Sarah screeched.

On a small technical point she was wrong. What we had all heard was not a gun but an explosive bomb signal, and that its significance was not lost on them was shown by the combined howl of fear that arose from the kids down in the boat. *They* knew what Sarah's gun meant and were demanding her immediate return. Another agonised howl showed that they had seen and understood the signal to which the explosion had drawn attention. From the yard across the signalling mast above the

Harbour Office there hung in a vertical line three lights—red, green, red—and the combination could hardly have been worse. It indicated that the wind might be expected to increase to full typhoon force at any moment. "Typhoon come one time; me go!" Sarah declared emphatically.

"Where you go?" the captain asked.

"Kowloon side; more better you go Stone-cutter's side. Good-bye!" Sarah replied.

Displaying an amazing agility for a woman of her age and portly figure, she nipped down the accommodation ladder and a minute later her crew was making sail. In an incredibly short time the sampan, close hauled on the port tack, had vanished into the gusty, dripping darkness. By that time the chief and second engineers had joined us. "How's the wind, Mackay?" the captain asked.

"A little to the north of east, sir," the second officer replied.

The captain did a quick mental calculation. "That means the centre is somewhere around the Formosa Channel, between us and Amoy," he said. "As I'm not exactly tired of life I shall stay in Hong Kong harbour—though that won't be much of a picnic, either. What about steam, chief?"

"Well, it was ordered for daylight, but when Mackay told me about the glass I put it on a bit. I can give you enough to move her in less than half an hour." Oil and water won't mix, indeed!



"Good man!" the captain cried heartily. "I'll take Sarah's advice and take shelter under the lee of Stonecutter's."

"We'll go down and hurry things up a bit," the chief said.

"Right, chief; I'll ring 'stand by' in about a quarter of an hour," the captain said. "Come up to the chart-room, you two."

In the chart-room we found the usually light-hearted captain in a very serious mood. "Has either of you ever been through a typhoon?" he asked.

We informed him that we had not.

"Well, I don't want to scare you," he said, "but you can hardly imagine a more frightening experience. It's worse than Valparaiso in a Norther and that's saying something, as you know. One of the reasons for that is the huge floating population here. You would have noticed how anxious Sarah was. Ever since that big typhoon a few years ago when, through some misunderstanding, unknown thousands of them were drowned, the Tanka people have been jumpy and nervous."

I thought of Sarah somewhere out there in the darkness with her boatload of yellow brats, and felt unhappy. If, intent on our own pleasure, we had not lingered up on the Peak, she, with her weather lore and sailorly instincts, would probably have found a safe shelter long ago.

"You had better get rid of that gorgeous raiment," the captain said to me. "You wouldn't feel too

good upon the fo'c'sle-head in half a gale in a dinner jacket and dancing pumps. In the meantime Mackay can go for'a'd and single up. When you're ready you can relieve him and heave a-weigh. The sooner we get across to Stonecutter's the better chance we'll have of taking up a front seat safely. Are the cables clear, Mackay?"

"All clear, sir," said Mackay.

A recognised typhoon anchorage, Wanchu-chow, commonly known as Stonecutter's, is an island about a mile long and half as broad, lying just a mile to the westward of the Kowloon Peninsula and about three miles from where we were then moored. I went forward, after changing, to find that Mackay had already got one anchor off the ground and was heaving in the cable of the other one. Soon I was able to report the anchor a-weigh. Captain Daniel carefully sheered the *Waihora* clear of the shipping, and headed her to the northward. The short journey that followed was a nightmare, for it soon became evident that a general exodus from the roadstead had begun. As, blindfolded by driving rain, we felt our way cautiously to the northward I became aware that the surface of the water in the vicinity was alive with moving craft. Ghostly shapes of junks and sampans would loom through the rain, all on the port tack and beating hard for shelter, while blasts from the steam whistles of deep-sea steamers showed that some of them at least were under way, making for the shelters they had selected. I could only hope



that too many of them had not selected Stonecutter's.

As a spectacle this clearing of Hong Kong harbour just before a typhoon is world-famous, and I regretted I had not been able to witness it by daylight. Before sunset anyone looking down from the Peak would have seen the face of the harbour literally covered with craft of all kinds, the channels between them that were kept clear for the passage of sea-going craft looking almost like lanes cut through tall reeds in a lake. By sunrise all these vessels would have gone—seeking safety. The face of the harbour, usually one of the most crowded in the world, would be as deserted as a Highland loch in winter.

We picked up Kowloon Point through the rain, or rather we picked up the menacing string of lights of the typhoon warning now being repeated from the staff on the roof of the Water Police Station. Menacing as a warning, it was none the less welcome as an aid to navigation, and from it the captain set a compass course for the middle of Stonecutter's. The weather was now really thick, and the moon only seemed to emphasise the opaqueness. The engine-room telegraph on the bridge clanged, and I decided that the captain had rung for dead slow. Even that was risky, and he would doubtless have anchored but for the urgent need for finding shelter.

I heard a creaking sound, then my thumping heart seemed to miss a beat as black sails loomed

out of the darkness close ahead—the sails of a big three-masted junk. As from my station on the forecastle-head I was at least one hundred and fifty feet nearer to her than was the captain on the bridge, I yelled to him at the pitch of my voice, and was answered by a great jangling of bells. The rails round the forecastle-head vibrated fiercely; the *Waihora's* powerful engines had been put full speed astern.

Closer and closer we drew toward the black sails and I found myself looking down at the junk's high poop on which her assembled hands were yelling as if they were being murdered and setting off fire crackers. We did not touch her, but she was less than a yard away from our stem when the reversed propeller drew us clear. I duly reported this to the bridge, and the engines were put ahead again.

A few minutes later the weather cleared a little and the island came into view dead ahead. What would we find there? Would all the ringside seats be taken? No! The way the wind was then blowing the best shelter was in a shallow bay on the south shore, and right at the eastern end of it I could see what looked like one of the Canton River steamers, tucked away as close to the shore as she could get. There was nothing else, and I could have jumped with relief.

With the hand-lead going we stood in carefully, and when the quartermaster at the lead reported a depth of six fathoms I was given the order to let go. "Give her seventy-five in the water and screw her up at that," the captain shouted.



I went up on the bridge to find that there had been a further alarming drop in the barometer, showing that the storm was approaching rapidly; and the fact that the wind had remained steady in direction was an indication that we were right on the line of progression of its centre.

"Well, that's about all we can do at present," the captain said as we sat in the chart-room discussing the situation. Although we had reached a sheltered anchorage with good holding ground, it was still decidedly grave, and everything would depend upon the strength of the approaching storm. Typhoons vary a good deal; some reach little more than heavy gale force, others attain to a fury that is almost unbelievable. The one that, a few years before, had played havoc with the nerves of Sarah and her clan and drowned so many thousands of junk and sampan people and fishermen, had overwhelmed hundreds of craft, large and small. Even on shore it had badly damaged many large buildings, and in some streets the demolition had been complete. Most experienced China Coast men know that type and shudder. I knew our captain to be a brave man, but could see that he was badly shaken. As he said, the different dangers a typhoon can bring are unpredictable; disaster may overtake you just when you feel most secure.

The best answer to those who do not know the difference between a typhoon, a cyclone, and a hurricane still remains that given by William Dampier in 1687. "For my part," he wrote, "I

know no difference between a hurricane among the Caribee in the West Indies and a Tuffoon upon the coast of China or in the East Indies but only the name," and modern meteorologists bear this out. They are all revolving storms, they say, and they are all bad—to be avoided if one can. We couldn't!

As we sat in the little chart-room listening to the dismal howling of the gale outside, all we knew about it was that somewhere between the Bashee Islands far to the east where it had been bred, and Hong Kong, an intense revolving storm was proceeding in a westerly direction; and that this colossal disturbance, covering many hundreds of square miles, was coming on like a gigantic cart-wheel at the rate of about three hundred miles a day; and that probably the wind, rotating anti-clockwise round its centre, would be attaining a strength of at least a hundred miles an hour. A fearsome thing indeed; and we could only sit and wait for it. The captain had one cheerful thing to say, and he said it, for he liked to talk of cheerful things: he did not believe it would last long when it *did* come. He quoted the weather rhyme:—

"Long foretold, long last,  
Short notice, soon past."

"And goodness knows the notice has been short enough this time," he added. "Now, look; we needn't all be up here. Let Mackay keep an anchor watch till four o'clock, then you can come up and



relieve him. I shall doss down on this settee and be handy."

The order was very welcome. It was long after midnight and I was yawning heavily. I had been on my feet since six o'clock the previous morning and it had been a heavy and varied day. When I stood on the deck with the captain at sunset, though the signs had been there if I had known how to read them, I had never imagined that long before the sun rose again the *Waihora* would be anchored under the lee of Stonecutter's island ready to ride out a typhoon.

## V.

At a quarter to four, when I was due to be called, my cabin was again flooded with electric light. I sat up and blinked at a Chinese quartermaster whose shiny black oilskins were dripping water all over my carpet. The howling of the wind outside brought me to my senses, and I pulled on my long oilskin coat, rubber sea-boots and sou'-wester, and stepped out into the port alleyway in which our cabins were situated. The wind was whistling eerily through it, and I was lashed with rain before I got to the forward end. It was not blowing as hard as I had feared, however, and I got up to the bridge without much difficulty.

I found Mackay sheltering behind the canvas dodger in the starboard wing. He was peering out

on the quarter, and before I could speak to him a long, deep blast on a steamer's whistle came through the murk. "A big ship, surely," I said to him.

"Yes; looks like one of the big North German Lloyd passenger boats. He's the first to arrive, but others are coming. Look!"

I stared out through the rain. Visibility was poor, but I could see the mast-head light and side-lights of a vessel approaching from off our port quarter. The German, for such she turned out to be, was now so close that I had to crane my neck to see her mast-head light and her red side-light, which seemed to be glaring malevolently. She *was* a big ship. "Where's the old man?" I asked.

"Still in the chart-room," Mackay answered. "There's been no need to call him—so far. The glass is still dropping; the squalls are more frequent, and there seems to be more weight in them, but she's lying quite steadily."

"All right, m'lad; buzz off and get some sleep, while you can."

"I could certainly do with it," Mackay cried heartily. "By Jove! that wind is tiring. Good-bye!"

He went off down the ladder and I turned my attention to the German. I could hear her leadsmen chanting the soundings, and the jangling of her two telegraphs, then a loud order, obviously passing through a megaphone. The order was repeated from forward; an anchor promptly splashed into



the water, and I could hear the great links of the heavy cable running out through the hawse-pipe. Simultaneously the navigation lights were switched off and the riding-lights on. Very smart, very precise, very German! In the half-light she looked enormous; she completely overshadowed us with her great bulk—indeed she appeared to overshadow Stonecutter's island. She had brought up between us and the Canton River boat, and lay, like us, head to wind, pointing straight toward the island.

The rain became really heavy, completely blotting out the island, and I never saw the approaching ships come to an anchor. I heard their cables running out though and knew they were there, and ten minutes later they were joined by another ship which anchored still farther to the westward. The captain came out of the chart-room, looking worried, and told me the barometer was down to 28.84.

Just then the rain ceased and the sky cleared, though another black squall could be seen working up over the land to the eastward, the Kowloon Peninsula. The first thing we saw beyond the German was the river steamer, *Hong Shan*, tucked away under the cliffs and looking very snug. With her shallow draft she could afford to get closer in than the rest of us. Then to the westward another steamer appeared, and yet another, manœuvring toward an anchorage. The sky cleared further till we could see right across to Hong Kong and even a little way up the Peak, the summit of which,

like all high ground, was completely hidden by heavy black clouds.

As I stood on the bridge with my back to the wind, thinking of nothing in particular, a rocket, leaving a fiery trail, soared skyward, giving me quite a lot to think about. It was a distress signal, and I placed the vessel that fired it somewhere in what had been a most congested part of the roadstead. It was quickly followed by another. I listened to the dull booming of the surf on the other side of Stonecutter's and trembled, for I knew it must be far worse over there at Victoria. It was terrible to think of unseen ships in the darkness of the night, helpless ships breaking adrift, driving swiftly to their doom and leaving a trail of sinking craft and dead men, women, and children behind them.

With breaking day we took advantage of a short lull in the storm to strengthen the *Waihora's* defences, as it were. Among other things, at the captain's suggestion I had double lashings put on the lifeboats, and I remember thinking that since they were already well secured on the boat deck, well clear of any sea that might break aboard, the extra lashings were redundant. How little I knew then of the irresistible power of wind!

Away to the north beyond the Dangerous Goods Anchorage we could see Lichi Kok storm signal-mast on the mainland, with the daylight typhoon signal showing on it. It consisted of a cone, point downward on top of a drum—and they were black.



"That combination means the centre is to the north-east of the colony, and being black means it is less than three hundred miles away," the captain said. "That's where it was when they last heard of it; but it's a good deal less than half that distance now. Thank God we didn't go to sea yesterday."

Squall succeeded squall, each one seemingly a little stronger than the one before it. We left Mackay on the bridge and went down to one of the *Waihora's* ample breakfasts. When I made for my room to wash my hands I found a small deputation of the clerical staff, headed by the English-speaking clerk who had given the receipt for the goats. With it was Jumbo, who tried to explain its presence.

"*Chinchew* no have got," he said.

The explanation was simple, as I pointed out to the anxious deputation. The great man was in the habit of spending his nights ashore in a Chinese hotel with two senior members of his staff, and when they got down to the Praya that morning no money they could offer would get hold of a sampan to bring them off. I did not think it mattered much, and told the deputation so. Great as was the *chinchew's* ability in financial and commercial matters, only Captain Daniel could nurse the *Waihora* through her present trouble and he was at his post. The deputation was still far from satisfied, but I was patient, for I could see that the members were badly scared. Then the unsophisticated Jumbo blurted out the truth.

"*Chinchew* lose plenty face Penang side," he wailed.

I might have known it. In dealing with Chinese, either collectively or individually, the question of "face"—personal prestige—can never be lost sight of. I thrashed it out with them. They reckoned that when it became known in Penang that the *chinchew* had remained on shore during a typhoon, instead of sharing its dangers on board, the owners and all the other Chinese in Penang would look upon him as a general who deserted his troops just before a battle, and if the *chinchew* lost "face," their "faces" would be lost too, for most of them were related to him. I suggested that the captain would be sure to write to the Koe Guan Company and explain the circumstances. That seemed to satisfy everybody except the English-speaking tally clerk, who was the *chinchew's* nephew, and whose worry was entirely different to that of the others. He was certain that his uncle, keen to get off to the ship, had managed to hire or borrow a sampan during the night, and had been drowned in the attempt—and who was I to say he was wrong? If he turned out to be right, the dead *chinchew* would have saved his "face"; and I got the impression that his nephew would have preferred it that way.

Throughout the rest of the day, lying abreast in a line about a mile long, the eight vessels sheltering off the south shore of Stonecutter's strained at their anchors with their taut cables sticking out



in front of them like long iron bars. All the time the wind steadily increased and the barometer steadily dropped. The situation was, as yet, menacing rather than dangerous. I do not pretend that I enjoyed that particular phase when the typhoon was still in its adolescent stage, but I would not have been elsewhere, for the experience was too valuable to be missed. Then, with the approach of darkness, there suddenly came fear—and I was not the only one to be afraid. I think the immediate cause was hearing, for the first time, the now really thunderous drumming of the surf along the exposed north shore of the island. It had a fury such as I could not have imagined; its thudding seemed to hammer at my brain; it rose above the roar of the wind in a crescendo that emphasised vividly the terrific destroying power from which that small island was protecting us.

A few minutes later, just as I thought I was getting used to fear, something terrifying happened; something real, immediate, and visible. The great German liner to starboard broke her sheer and came yawing toward us. It was as if, at sea, she had swerved some sixty degrees off her course. Instead of having the wind ahead she had brought it broad off on the starboard bow; and as she was something like six hundred feet long and fifty feet from the line of her boats to the waterline, she held a lot of it. The strain on her cable, leading broad off to starboard, must have been enormous, and the danger was that she might drag into us and

set us adrift to go crashing into the next ship to port—and what the end of *that* might be was too staggering to contemplate.

The reaction of the German liner's captain was swift. Using his engines he managed to square her up and bring her head to wind again; but after that we had to watch her like a hawk—and very soon they had to watch us.

By some strange impulse every vessel in the line began to sheer heavily, and soon all were using engines and rudders. What a sight that was! Eight anchored ships yawing violently to the full scope of their chains. Sometimes they sheered away from each other; sometimes they sheered inward so that only a few yards of churned-up water separated them. I shuddered to think of what might happen later, when rain and darkness combined to hide from us that long line of moving ships. Invisible they might be, but they would still be there; each ship a menace to herself and every other vessel in the line. The nearest on the port side was a Glen liner, and while she was not as long as the German, she had not got the latter's inestimable advantage of twin screws.

There was no question of an anchor watch that night; all three of us remained on the bridge and never thought of leaving it—and still the barometer continued to drop. It turned out to be a night of horror, one of the worst I ever knew. Just before darkness closed right down I ventured to ask the



captain how much longer the storm would last. His reply was sternly uncompromising.

"It has hardly started yet," he said.

## VI.

By eight o'clock we knew that the moon must be well up, though we could not see it through the dense clouds and the rain; but we could feel that the darkness was a little less intense, and when the rain eased a little we could even see the third ship on each side. At times the sky to the northward would brighten in an extraordinary way so that we could actually see the south shore of the island. Those short spells of comparative brightness puzzled us till the captain realised that they were due to flashes of lightning, the accompanying peals of thunder being lost in the roaring of the wind and the drumming of the surf.

By that time our nerves were inclined to get the better of us. The dread of what was yet to come and the increasing strain entailed by even trying to exist under such conditions made life on that gale-swept bridge almost intolerable. In spite of the wind the air was heavy, oppressive, and unnaturally stagnant. The barometer had dropped to 28.70, but the wind did not vary a point in direction, and from those two factors we could readily deduce with certainty that the centre of

the storm was rapidly drawing nearer and that we were right on its line of progression.

With a quartermaster at the wheel steering by compass to keep her steady, and the engines running at slow ahead to ease the strain on the anchor and cable, the *Waihora* was not yawing too badly. We could not be sure what the other ships were doing, but we could be sure of the German because, since his first dangerous sheer, he had been steering with his engines. The Glen boat was our worst danger, for she, besides being a long ship, was somewhat nearer to us. She was also a little nearer to the shore than we were, with her bridge half a ship's length ahead of ours.

We were less than two cables' length—400 yards—from the beach, and the island itself was only a mile from the nearest land, so there was no room for a really mountainous sea to get up, and that is probably the most dangerous thing about a typhoon in the open ocean. We were not spared entirely, however; short, but vicious waves like breakers were running and smashing against our bows like blows from a gigantic sledge-hammer. As a result, the bridge was soon enveloped in fine spray which stung the eyes till they burned. The canvas screens had been furled, for they would have blown to ribbons.

Suddenly a rain squall, the like of which I had never seen, lashed us; it was as if the heavens had opened and let down a flood, so that, shaken as we were, I could almost imagine being drowned.



on the bridge where we stood. In a way it was a blessing; for by putting out my tongue I could tell whether it was rain or spray; and if it was rain, by wiping my eyes with my hand I could alleviate some of the terrible burning pain. Later I learned that my companions had also tumbled to that trick. At the time we were not on what might be called speaking terms; for the second officer was in the starboard wing of the bridge, I was in the port wing, and the captain amidships encouraging the helmsman. The rain eased a little and a particularly vivid flash of lightning showed up the German liner; but all we could see of her was the tops of her two great yellow funnels and her masts, rising out of a curtain of wildly whirling spray.

Just after that the true hurricane wind hit us. It came with a roar like that of an express train emerging from a tunnel, and I could hardly breathe. The gusts threatened to beat the life out of our shrinking bodies. Just before that master wind struck, the captain had gone into the chart-room to look at the barometer, and he was still in there, which surprised me, for he was not the man to shrink exposure. Then I got a glimpse of his face through the misty glass of one of the ports. He nodded toward the door, which he was kicking with all his strength, and I realised what had happened. He had got in but could not get out; the door, which faced to port, opened outwards, and with the pressure of the wind he could not

force it open. Mackay, a powerful lad, seized the brass handle with both hands and, exerting all his strength, got the door open enough for me to get my boot between the door and the jamb.

The captain got his shoulder to the door, and between us we managed to open it far enough for him to squeeze through. When outside he urged us toward the after-end of the chart-house where, partially sheltered, we could speak, though to speak was to roar. He told us the barometer had fallen to 28.5, and was even palpitating down as low as 27.97! It was the most ominous sign the storm had shown so far. "We're in for something really bad," the captain said gravely.

He dropped on to his hands and knees and crawled toward the binnacle, where he held on to the legs of the helmsman who was lashed to the wheel standard; while I, thinking the hurricane could not possibly get worse, though greatly fearing that it might, hung on to the port rails, the upper one of which was of broad solid teak. Mackay joined me, and I was glad of his company though speech was impossible. Both ends of the midship signal halliards were belayed to the teak rail, and with their ends Mackay and I lashed each other to it. This saved the strain on our arms and legs; and I no longer wondered why the captain had suggested that I put double lashings on the boats. That wind could have moved anything.

I find it difficult to write about the next few hours. Bruised and semi-paralysed by the buffet-



ing and deafened by the roar of the wind, we hung on helplessly and waited for the dawn. Everything around us seemed to have gone mad. The ship was being subjected to the most alarming shocks; sometimes she shuddered so violently that had I not known it was impossible for her to drag against the gale I would have sworn she was in the breakers. Our worst moment came when Mackay made a convulsive grab at my hand and stared fearfully out to port; I knew that he felt as I did that the Glen liner had sheered over till she was almost right alongside. I do not know how close she actually did get, for we never saw her; but a few seconds later we were gasping and being choked by acrid, gaseous fumes, and spitting out soot. The smoke from her funnel was eddying across our bridge, and the water from the wave she had squeezed up between the two ships was lapping through the rails at our feet. The air became clear again and we knew she had sheered away. A narrow, nerve-racking escape!

That was our darkest moment, but there was nothing to indicate to us, in our despair, that the ordeal was coming to an end. It must have been about the hour of the dawn when we suddenly realised that we could see ships on both sides as well as the higher ground behind the coastline of Stonecutter's. Next came a delightful sense of bodily relief and lightness, as if the pressure of the wind had eased. I saw the captain pull himself slowly to his feet, stretch himself, then stand upright

without any support. There used to be a saying in the old days of sail that the captain who watched his barometer watched his ship, and judged by that standard Captain Daniel was just about the most watchful shipmaster on the coast of China. As soon as he found he could walk he made straight for the chart-room.

It was now almost dead calm; the smoke from the ship's funnels was going straight up in the air. Only the snarling sea alongside and the booming of the distant surf remained to remind us we were in the heart of a typhoon. From the other side of the German there came sounds like the rattling of a steam winch accompanied by the blowing of steam. Mackay and I stared across to see that, just opening out clear of the liner's bow, the *Hong Shan* was heaving in her cable.

The rain had almost ceased. Overhead it looked so bright that I almost expected to see blue sky. A moment later I did; through a great rift in the clouds just astern of the Glen boat I saw a patch of the most vivid blue. I stared at it with delighted eyes. "Mackay," I cried, "come and see this spot of paradise!"

Drawn by my shout the captain came out of the chart-room, and at once I could see that my enthusiasm was misplaced. As he stared at the patch I could see something almost akin to terror in his eyes. He spoke in quick staccato sentences. "The centre; already! Glass has jumped six-tenths. Within half an hour the wind will shift



right round!" he said. He pointed at the blue patch. "Wind will come from there! You know what that means?"

"Yes, sir, we'll be on a dead lee shore," I said.

"We would be if we were still here; but, please God! we won't be," he said. "Get your anchor a-weigh! You've got less than half an hour to do it!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" I cried breathlessly.

I thought I saw a way to save time. On the fore-deck, just outside the door of the fore-castle, about a dozen men, including the boatswain and the carpenter, stood stretching themselves and gazing round in a bewildered way. Rejoicing in my restored freedom of action, I moved quickly to the fore part of the bridge.

"Bo's'n!" I shouted.

"Mastah!"

"Makee heave anchor up; chop chop heave!"

"Al'ite, mastah!"

I was rewarded by seeing the boatswain, carpenter, and a dozen men running up the ladder on to the fore-castle-head.

"Look," the captain said. "I shall follow the *Hong Shan*. Her captain knows; he's been running round here for thirty years and knows the water like a book. He may only go round to the other side of the island, but we'll see."

Already the windlass was revolving and the chain cable was coming in through the hawse-pipe. "Jolly quick work," said Captain Daniel.

I went down the bridge ladder like a scalded cat and rushed forward to join the group on the fore-castle-head.

## VII.

The *Waihora's* windlass was both quick and powerful, and by the time I reached the fore-castle-head the slack of the cable was rattling in. The first thing I noticed was that the methodical, well-trained boatswain had got the hose along and was washing the mud off the links of the cable as they came in. I could hardly curb my impatience, so, to calm myself, I thought over all I had heard or read about the dreaded centre of a revolving storm.

I remembered that as an apprentice I had been told that very little was known, for the simple reason that few ships caught in the centre ever got out. This, of course, was altogether too crude; since then more has been learned, and while none of the authorities suggest that survival would be impossible, they do maintain that it is difficult, and in the worst storms damage is almost unavoidable. The belief that the centre, round which the hurricane wind rotates, is calm, is universal; and it has also been proved that as the calm moves away the wind shifts and blows even more violently from the opposite direction while the barometer rises rapidly. My thoughts were interrupted by



AFTER THE TYPHOON



FRANK H. MASON



a hail from the bridge. "How does your cable grow?"

"Right ahead, sir," I replied.

"Let me know when it's up and down."

The captain was understandably anxious. He was pacing the bridge with quick, nervous steps, and I was leaning over the fore-castle-head almost sick with impatience, and feeling that every minute the cable was passing in through the hawse-pipe was as long as an hour.

There came a welcome diversion. Jumbo of the big feet and the cheery grin appeared on the fore-castle-head carrying a tray with a jug of steaming hot coffee and a large plateful of sandwiches, and I welcomed him; for I had eaten nothing but a biscuit since seven o'clock the previous evening.

The windlass barrel revolved steadily, and hardly had the last sandwich gone its appointed way than the cable came up and down. "Anchor's a-weigh, sir!" I yelled at the pitch of my voice a moment later.

The engine-room telegraph chimed, and I could see a quartermaster turning the wheel to starboard; evidently Captain Daniel intended to cross the German liner's bows. Her cable was hanging straight down from the hawse-pipe; they had not started to heave it in, though an officer and some men had just gone on the fore-castle-head. The upper clouds were already moving up from the south-west and most of the ships, having at last realised the menace, were getting under way. The Glen liner's stern

had started to swing toward the German—and just then I saw that we were in a very tight corner indeed. We could not now get clear by going astern ; and the German, having drifted ahead till she was almost over her anchor, had narrowed the gap between her bows and the beach to such an extent that it seemed very doubtful if we could get through it with safety. The *Waihora* had come round nicely so that she was almost parallel with the beach and therefore in a good position for shooting ahead, but Captain Daniel had stopped the engines as if in doubt. It was then that one of those pleasant little touches of courtesy between seamen of different races, then so common, occurred. "*Waihora ! ahoy !*" came peeling through a megaphone.

I looked across at the liner's bridge ; the megaphone, pointed toward us, was in the hands of a burly German whose peaked cap was heavily adorned with gold lace.

"Hullo !" Captain Daniel replied.

"You can come ahead ; I will give my engines a touch astern."

"Thank you very much," Captain Daniel shouted.

There followed sounds that we had come to know so well, the clanging of the German's telegraph, and the great hull glided back almost imperceptibly. Captain Daniel came ahead with the *Waihora*, and doubtless dreading that there might be outlying dangers from the beach, passed so close to the liner's bows that her chief officer seemed to be



looking down at me as we passed ; for she towered high above us. It was he who eventually signalled that our stern was clear of her bows.

We were now well after the *Hong Shan*, which was just rounding White Point at the south-east corner of the island ; and when we in turn got abreast of the point, I noticed a number of dark objects moving along the Kowloon shore, about a mile away to the eastward. Across there the south-west wind had already freshened till there were white horses on the tops of the waves, and those objects were scudding before it. Had their hulls been more shapely, and their sails been of gleaming white canvas instead of mat sails stiffened by bamboo laths, I would have thought I was seeing a yacht race, for all classes ; each yacht running hard for the finishing mark. There were about two dozen of them, junks, large and small, and big sampans ; and the mark was the southern entrance to the built-up Typhoon Refuge Anchorage.

Doubtless they had just left some shelter farther down the Peninsula, driven out by the shift of wind. Once they reached the refuge they would be safe, for it had been built to give shelter all round ; but it seemed to me there was going to be a terrible scrummage at the narrow entrance. Steaming at full speed, and easily keeping the *Hong Shan* in sight, we rounded the eastern end of the island and passed westward between it and the Trocas Rock, over which the sea was breaking.

On the northern shore there was a deep bay

marked at its western side by rifle butts; it lay opposite the bay on the other side where we had been sheltering. Obviously it was where the *Hong Shan* was making for, and we followed her as closely as we dared. She brought up at last, and we anchored at a safe distance from her; and not a moment too soon, for a black squall came howling over the island and shut her out from view. I paid out ninety fathoms of cable, saw the windlass screwed up, and joined the captain on the bridge. "Well, we managed it, thank God!" he said. "We should be all right now."

The blue patch which had comforted me, and, fortunately, alarmed the captain, had vanished and the sky again presented a wild and terrifying appearance. Where it had been blue it was now an unnatural, sickly green, which grew and spread. It was fringed by dense purple-black clouds from which great masses were torn away to come hurtling at us straight across the island. The *Hong Shan* dropped back to the full extent of her cable and strained at it wildly; then with a roar that drowned every other sound the renewed gale struck us fine on the starboard bow. Another old weather and barometer rhyme came to my mind:—

"First rise after low  
Indicates a stronger blow."

A stronger blow . . . Between us and the beach there was a ground swell, a legacy from the gale when it had been blowing from the northward. The tops of the rollers were being sliced off, as if



by a giant knife, and tossed upward and forward in great whirling clouds. It was a wild moment ; sea, spray, and sky seemed to be mixed in one awful smother.

We felt a jolt that almost threw us off our feet and knew the cable had straightened out till it was as taut as an iron bar again ; so powerful, indeed, had been the jolt that we stared forward anxiously, afraid that the windlass had been started from its seating. We could just see the long, bare forecastle-head, along which the rain was lashing horizontally, like the flowing of a river, banking up at the after-end, and pouring down on to the fore-deck like a waterfall. The windlass, standing up out of the stream, was still firmly seated.

Once again we were pinned down to one place and compelled to hang on to the bridge rails with all our strength ; but it did not seem to be so bad now. As soon as he could get into the chart-room the captain found the barometer still rising, but steadily. He impressed that on us—*steadily*. We had many hours of daylight ahead of us and could feel that the worst was over ; once the first furious gusts of the renewed onslaught had passed the weather ought to improve.

The first sign of improvement came with the clearing of the rain, though it revealed something that saddened us. As soon as we could see across Stonecutter's we noticed two masts and a funnel lying over at a grotesque angle. Even now I can remember that funnel. It was mainly yellow, but

had a touch of green in it. It belonged to a tramp steamer which had been at the western end of the line of anchored ships, and she had failed to get away. Though we did not know it then, two more of the vessels which had been sheltering with us had also met disaster that morning. Making for shelter farther to the eastward, they had collided south of Kowloon Point, probably during the very heavy rain squall, and sunk.

Stonecutter's island was not entirely bare ; to the south-east of the high ground overlooking the rifle range it was wooded, and the small wood was now the scene of intense feathered activity. Hundreds of birds which must have settled down for a rest on the island during the calm period, and now found themselves in danger of being blown off it, were fighting for shelter under the trees. It was still blowing very hard, but I found I could use my binoculars. They were not gulls as I had supposed, but land birds, probably blown down from the mainland to the north. Most of them settled in ; others with feebly beating wings drifted helplessly past us. A brace of curlew did manage to board us and took refuge under one of the boats.

The sky to the northward cleared till we could see the signal mast at Lichi Kok. It displayed a single object—a black cone, which, as the captain explained, indicated that the typhoon had moved to the north of the colony. "By Jove! they've been pretty smart over changing that," Captain



Daniel said. "Good luck to it, it can't go too far north for us."

By sunset the wind had moderated to what we estimated to be force 8 and the sky looked much more peaceful. We all had dinner together in the saloon, and the captain intimated that we would leave the keeping of an anchor watch to the quartermaster and have a good night's sleep in our bunks. And oh! the bliss of that full night in bed! Away from that exposed gale-swept bridge! Hearing but feebly the terrible roaring of the wind with its ever-present ominous moaning for a hideous undertone!

Before turning in, Captain Daniel talked about leaving. "If it wasn't that the benighted *chínchei* is ashore I could have gone straight to sea from here," he said. "I cleared for Amoy on Tuesday, the day we dined up the Peak, and there's nothing else to stop our departure. I owe Sarah for a few days' sampan hire, but *she* won't worry about that. She knows she'll get it some day; plus a few dollars she'll stick on, for interest. Believe me, there are very few flies on our Sarah."

## VIII.

The sun was shining in a clear sky when we got under way at seven o'clock, the *Hong Shan* having left half an hour earlier, making for the Pearl

River on her way to Canton. The surface of the harbour was glassy, though there was a ground swell rolling up from the south-west. As we passed the east end of the island and the *Waihora's* bow dipped to the swell, we opened out the uneasy anchorage from which we had left in such a hurry the previous morning, and had our first glimpse of the devastation we were to find all through the harbour.

The southern shore of Stonecutter's was strewn with the wreckage of small craft washing about in the breakers. On the rocks lay the wreck of the tramp steamer; she had broken in two just forward of the bridge, and her funnel was tossing alongside. Continuing on our southerly course we sighted a large sampan, waterlogged and sinking, and with her mast broken off halfway up. Holding on in the forepart of the boat were a woman and three children, and to the stump of the mast was tethered a male child. We knew it was a male because round its waist there had been tied a piece of coir rope, the other end of which was attached to a block of wood large enough to float the child if it fell overboard. They would not take that much trouble over a girl.

It would have been too much of a coincidence, of course, but . . . the same doubt seemed to assail Captain Daniel, for he dived into the chart-room, brought out his binoculars, and trained them on the sampan. In the arched mat cabin three



human beings were crouched ; and after a good look at them the captain sighed with relief. " They're men," he declared, " and Sarah would never have a man on board her boat ; still, we'll give them a chance."

We called the boatswain to bring a heaving line and slowed the engines, and just as we got abreast of it the heaving line, well and truly flung, rattled into the mat cabin. No attempt was made to catch it as it slid slowly over the side. " No use ; they're all dead," Captain Daniel said. " Put her on full speed again."

We forged ahead and before she was a hundred yards astern the sampan rolled over and sank. Along the shore to the eastward the waves were flowing in to well beyond high-water mark, where they met the torrents of rain water pouring down off the hills. That part of the coast had trapped many small vessels, for the havoc was even worse than along the beach of Stonecutter's, and many corpses were washing about. It was a ghastly scene of tragedy, and I was truly glad when we passed Kowloon Point and shut the surging wreckage out from view.

No sooner were we clear of one tragedy than we came on the scene of another—not so ghastly, but poignant, because we knew the two vessels that lay at the bottom of the Central Fairway with only their masts and funnels showing above water. We knew them by their funnels, for they had shared

the shelter of Stonecutter's with us for two nights ; and this was confirmed when a little later we met a tug which the harbour authorities had sent to mark their graves with green wreck-buoys, and spoke to its captain.

Captain Daniel's idea was to stand over for the Canton Steamboat Pier, then turn to the eastward and steam slowly through the Southern Fairway, giving an occasional blast on the steam whistle to try and attract attention. He did not want to anchor if he could help it. Already there was considerable activity in Victoria Bay and off the Man-o'-War Anchorage. Sampans were plying for hire ; steamers that had run for shelter were returning ; two others had come straight in from sea, their funnels and masts white with dried spray. The captain was in the starboard wing of the bridge, sweeping the various landing jetties with his binoculars, while I kept a look-out from the other side.

After a few minutes I noticed a large sampan putting out from the shore with what looked like a dancing dervish on its deck ; obviously he was trying to attract our attention, and I heard what I can only describe as a shrieking hail of "*W'hola ! w'hola !*" "*That's Sarah's sampan !*" Captain Daniel said to me.

The *Waihora* was moving ahead at the rate of a couple of knots when Sarah ran alongside the accommodation ladder, and one of her infants caught the rope that had been thrown to them



from our fore-deck. The sampan's sail came rattling down and was quickly secured; the craft lay quietly alongside the ladder. "Have got *chinchew*! Have got *chinchew*!" Sarah yelled.

"All right, Sarah; shove him aboard chop chop," Captain Daniel cried. "My wantchee go to sea one time."

The *chinchew* and his two companions, trying hard to look dignified, stepped on to the lower platform of the ladder, and Sarah again gave tongue. "My wantchee eight dolla', seventy-two cent," she shouted.

"All right, darling," Captain Daniel shouted back; "send your chief officer up for it quick. My no can stop long this morning."

Nimble as a monkey the boy ran up to the bridge, got the money plus half a dollar for himself, and ran down again. Sarah made sure the money was right, then with a farewell wave of her large and dirty paw sheered the boat off.

With the engines moving at half speed we moved along the narrow roadstead. Captain Daniel, pipe in mouth again, stood beside the wheel. He bore little trace of the intense strain to which he had been subjected; indeed he seemed to be as gay, carefree, and debonair as when singing his after-dinner songs—but every white man on board, and a good many yellow ones too, knew to whom, under Providence, the *Waihora* owed her safety, and they their lives.

There was still a lot of wreckage to be avoided,

most of it waterlogged and difficult to see, and we proceeded cautiously. A little later I noticed, just beyond North Point, a towering hull and two yellow funnels belching black smoke. It was the German liner with the courteous captain, making, like ourselves, for the narrow Lye-e-mun and the open sea beyond it.



## AMONG CORAL REEFS IN THE *FLEVO*.

### I.

It may be remembered that the man who advised me to go to the East for quick promotion recommended me to do two things: study the Malay language, and keep my nose clean; adding that if I did I should get a command within a couple of years. Fortunately the exhortation about the cleanliness of my nose was purely figurative, for when the right moment that led to the fulfilment of my aspirations came, my nose, like the rest of my face, was dirtier than I had ever known it during my sojourn in the East; for I had been crawling round some of the *Waihora's* seldom-visited inner parts in the company of a very influential official.

I had been let in for this dirty, though to me very interesting job by a combination of circumstances. The Marine Superintendent, whose principal interest it was, had been recalled to Penang; and Captain Daniel, whose wife had come to Singapore and was living with him at Raffles Hotel, had jibbed at it. He said he could see no reason why

he should keep a dog and bark himself—the dog being me—and furthermore, he said, the dog knew far more about the construction of a ship than he did; far more, for that matter, than the Marine Superintendent himself did. The *Waihora* was lying in dry-dock in Keppel Harbour, Singapore, a particularly sticky place at any time, and was being put through the annual survey which all passenger ships had to undergo.

The influential official, with whom I should probably never have come in contact in any other way, for his station in life out there was far higher than mine, was Mr Trowel, Surveyor-in-Chief to the Straits Settlements, a man with a reputation for uncompromising strictness in interpreting the rules, and an eye like a hawk for defects, of which there were many. Nine-tenths of the coastal shipping that used the ports of Penang and Singapore were Chinese owned, and the Chinese would rarely acquire a new ship. Some of the ships they bought were good for many years, others were just about fit for the scrap heap; but whatever class they belonged to there was always considerable anxiety among their owners when the time for their annual survey came round; for the replacement of a condemned boiler, for instance, could readily swallow up the profits for a whole year.

Mr Trowel had come out from England about two years before, at a time when there was considerable trouble in shipping circles and much loose talk about bribery and corruption. He soon



showed that he was not only thoroughly efficient, but also that he was incorruptible, absolutely straight and above-board. He had just earned the trust and respect of most sections of the community when something happened that shook the whole of the East and was profoundly to upset its future—hostilities began between Russia and Japan.

War caught the Japanese, as it usually catches nations, short of shipping; very soon they had agents out buying up anything that would float, and they found unscrupulous shipowners ready to oblige them with vessels that would have difficulty in floating even as far as Japan. The unscrupulous ones soon found they had Mr Trowel to deal with. Like most of us out there, who knew the Japs rather better than the good people at home who babbled about the Britons of the Orient and the chivalry of old Japan, he did not have a great deal of use for them; but he was jealous for the honour of the Straits Settlements, and he made it his business to see that no vessel left them unless she was entirely seaworthy. He also got up against that clan which for want of a better name I will call the near-beachcomber.

They were not the real beachcombers who slept on the open beaches of the South Sea Islands and lived on breadfruit. They were certificated masters, mates, and marine engineers who had come to grief; and mainly because of its mild and genial climate Singapore held a bigger proportion of these

gentry than any other port in the East. Most of them had come down through drink ; others because of accidents leading to their certificates being dealt with. Many of them had surprisingly good manners, manners which would have enabled them to behave decently in any society prepared to receive them. Some of them went native and lived their squalid lives in idleness. All were totally unreliable and eventually unemployable.

To them, at first, the Russo-Japanese war came as a boon ; ships that had been laid up for months had to be officered and manned for the passage to Japan, and no one grudged them this employment. But they were not contented for long. They demanded to be signed on the articles for two years' service on the coast of Japan, at three times the prevailing rates of pay, on the plea that such service would be in the war zone. It was the forthright Mr Trowel who put an end to that racket. He pointed out to those responsible for delivering the ships that this would be committing the Japanese buyers, who would not be prepared to carry such people for ballast ; so they continued to be signed on for the run with the guarantee of a return passage. No, the beachcombers did not like Mr Trowel—and he did not like them. They did not conform with his high ideals regarding the conduct of the Briton in the East.

The *Waihora* had been put through a very strict survey in New Zealand before being purchased by the Koe Guan Company a little over a year earlier,



and that was possibly the reason why they let me have the responsibility of dealing with the Surveyor. We usually called at Singapore at least once a month, and we had heard the usual gossip about Mr Trowel and his strictness, but I had not met him until the day when, clad in boiler suits, we descended into the *Waihora's* hold and began to go through her bilges.

At first the proceedings were very formal, as might have been expected; for my companion did not know me, and I might have been of the beachcomber class myself. He worked very quickly, occasionally dictating to an assistant who carried a notebook, while I remained discreetly silent. Then I ventured to disagree with him over a certain point, and after a couple of minutes' argument he accepted my view. After that, obviously to the surprise of his assistant, he consulted me on several matters; and I began to enjoy myself. By four o'clock when, having finished our work in the hold, we returned to the deck, I asked him to come into my room for a wash, then afterwards to the saloon for tea. "I would love a cup of tea; lead the way," he answered.

I had previously warned the chief steward; and Jumbo, very smartly attired for the occasion, and another servant, hovered around attentively. After making a good tea Mr Trowel became expansive; though occasionally when I felt his piercing eye on me, I had the impression that, having finished surveying the ship for the day,

he was now surveying her chief officer, as if he were something novel in the way of chief officers. A reference to the next day's work, which was to begin in the bottom of the dock and would include an inspection of the rudder, brought a personal question. "Tell me," he said, "where did you acquire your knowledge of ship construction? You are about the first officer I have met out here who even knew the rudiments of it." (That was undoubtedly true of those days; it is vastly different now.)

I told him that I had studied the subject and had obtained certificates in naval architecture. He questioned me about my other qualifications, and again I got the impression that he was not merely making polite conversation but was genuinely interested. To begin with, my extra-master's certificate impressed him, and I gathered there were few of those about in that part of the East. At last he rose to go and I saw him along the deck on his way to his steam launch, lying on the off-shore side. "You must be an expert navigator," he said, just before he got on to the platform of the accommodation ladder. "Do you know anything about marine surveying?"

"Yes, sir; I took a course in it."

"I mean, could you survey a roadstead, for instance, or a passage through reefs?"

"Oh yes, sir," I answered confidently.

"Well, thanks for an excellent tea; I'll be along at six in the morning," Mr Trowel said.



## II.

Next morning I found that our party had been reinforced by the Marine Superintendent, who had returned from Penang, though Captain Daniel still preferred the cleanliness and comfort of Raffles Hotel.

Before we made a move to the bottom of the dock there was some exciting news to discuss, and we adjourned to the saloon for the discussion. Mr Trowel had brought a copy of that morning's 'Straits Times' containing an account of a very one-sided battle in the North Sea; and told us the whole of Singapore was in an uproar over it, and the rest of the world would soon be. It concerned the Russian fleet, which Admiral Razhdestvensky had taken command of in the Baltic about the middle of October 1904, and which had started its blundering voyage half-way round the world in an attempt to reach Vladivostok and reinforce the Russian fleet already in the Far East. We knew that this armada had passed out of the Baltic, but certainly had not expected the startling news Mr Trowel had just brought us about it.

The Russians reached the North Sea and were steaming south, when one night, off the Dogger Bank, they sighted some small vessels which, through sheer nervousness or by some extraordinary reasoning which ignored both intelligence and geography, the officers decided were Japanese

torpedo-boats. The Russians opened fire, and some of the small vessels were hit and sunk—inoffensive British fishing-boats.

Mr Trowel was a very angry man that morning. As has been said, he had not much use for the Japanese, certainly not for the type to be found in the Straits. His clean nature rebelled against their low moral standards, their business methods, and their whole way of life. If anything, he rather favoured the Russians in this war. But he was a Briton first of all; and this cold-blooded murder of British fishermen, even if we tried to be charitable and ascribed it to panic, simply infuriated him. "We might see a battle round here," the Marine Superintendent said. "The Japs will surely prevent the Russians from entering the China Sea."

"Don't you believe it," Mr Trowel retorted in his forthright way. "They'll lay for the Russians much nearer home; and those cowardly murderers will find they're not up against trawlers."

We went to the bottom of the dock and, beginning with the rudder, carried on with the survey. After we had finished and the others had gone away, Mr Trowel asked if he might have a private talk with me. I took him into my room. "From what you told me last evening I gathered that your purpose in coming out here was to get a command as quickly as possible," he said.

"That's right, sir," I answered.

"Well, I am in a position to offer you one. Now, don't get wildly excited and want to embrace me



before you hear the details. The vessel, in which I take a considerable interest, is only one hundred and forty-nine tons net register. She is measured one ton under the one hundred and fifty so that she needn't carry a certificated mate. You and the chief engineer would be the only certificated officers on board."

I suppose my face must have fallen and he had noticed it, for he put up his hand. "Now listen," he continued. "She is big enough for the special trade she is in; indeed I imagine there might be times when you would wish she was somewhat smaller. She is a very fine little vessel and you could make a yacht of her. I have rarely seen finer accommodation. The captain's cabin is bigger than the *Waihora's*, and she has a beautiful roomy bridge so well fitted with screens that it can serve as another cabin. It is practically watertight and has a permanent, painted awning. It is so spacious that there is room for a large canvas cot and several long chairs abaft the wheel. In this climate you could live up there, and it would certainly hold a pretty considerable tea-party."

"It sounds very nice, sir," I said, "and I suppose she's big enough for the purpose."

"Oh quite; and she's foreign going. Command of her for twelve months would qualify you for anything."

This coming from such authority was definitely assuring, and it gradually dawned on me that I had got what I came East for—and in one year,

instead of the two my adviser had suggested. "I would like to make it quite clear that when I said I had an interest in the vessel, I did not mean a financial interest; as a Government official I keep myself above suspicion in every way. But I do take an interest in her owners, who are very worthy people.

"However, before you decide, I must tell you that there are special features about this job that I think would appeal to you. This steamer, the *Flevo*, runs around the Anamba and Natuna islands. The Anambas you may have sighted on your way to China; but the Natunas are pretty remote and you may not even know where they are. Both groups really belong to the Dutch, but I don't believe a Dutchman has visited them for years; certainly no white man lives on them."

"What's the idea of a vessel running there in that case?"

"There are a number of Chinese keeping stores, trading with the Malays, and gathering copra; and they are opening up new plantations. In all those enterprises the old *towkay* who owns the *Flevo* is financially interested. Teo Hoo Lye is his name and he is a very shrewd man of business; thoroughly honest, but uneducated and inclined to be superstitious. He came down from Amoy as a coolie many years ago; and deserves great credit for having risen to what he is now. He has a son, however, Teo Tao Peng, with whom you would have to deal, and he is entirely different, except for



the honesty. He is a splendid specimen of the Straits-born Chinese, was educated at Raffles College here, plays cricket and speaks perfect English. You would like him.

"Those two *towkays* form the company. They are eager to expand their trade and help to develop the islands, but any idea of expansion is completely held up by the captain of the *Flevo*."

"What's the matter with *him*?"

"Everything," Trowel answered promptly, "except that he takes his ship safely through a very dangerous stretch of water. There are good charts of the Anambas; but the Natuna islands haven't been surveyed since 1811, and then by the Dutch. They fairly bristle with uncharted reefs, and this darned old villain, Chester, is the only man alive who knows them. He has the old *towkay* exactly where he wants him, which wouldn't matter so much if he would only play the game. But he won't; none of those blasted beachcombers will."

"Oh, he's one of *that* breed?"

"Born and bred in Whitechapel, I should think, and he's had his ticket dealt with at least once. An example of what I mean—on one occasion, not very long ago, the *Flevo* had been lying fully loaded, with the Blue Peter flying, for three days, and Chester couldn't be found. The two *towkays* at last ran him to earth in a pub, boozing with some of his beachcomber pals. There was a disgraceful scene, I believe. Amid the jeers of the other cads, Chester loftily demanded his employers' reason for

disturbing him while he was entertaining his friends. At last he condescended to say he would go on board his ship providing that first of all the *towkays* would stand the assembled 'gentlemen' champagne all round. They got him aboard at last, and the ship left, but as he could hardly stand, I don't know how she got as far as the Horsburgh. Through the gunner ignoring his orders, I expect. Really, the whole thing made my blood boil."

"Why don't they get rid of him?" I asked.

"My dear young man," Trowel replied, "it's to help them to do away with that offensive black-guard that I'm sitting here with you now. But young Tao Peng and I have to be very diplomatic about it. If you mention it to the old *towkay* at present he almost has a fit. For one thing the *Flevo* is the apple of his eye; for another she isn't insured. No company would take the risk of insuring a vessel running round the Natunas. At the finish of one voyage Chester had to cry off and go to hospital—alcoholic poisoning, I believe. He recommended an old stiff to take his place for a trip—one of those wasters who cannot keep a ship for more than one voyage. This one didn't keep the *Flevo* as long as that; the very first island he came to he bashed her on a rock and knocked a hole in her for'a'd. Luckily, the collision-bulkhead held, and she crawled back to Singapore three feet by the head."

"Surely *that* put paid to all this nonsense," I suggested.



"On the contrary it put up Chester's stock higher than ever. The old *towkay* quoted the Chinese equivalent of 'The devil you know is far better than the devil you don't know,' and said Chester had never done a thing like that. But Tao Peng has had more than enough of it. For one thing he is losing face all over the Straits; and he has pleaded with me with tears in his eyes to help him. I told him there was only one cure—to find a scientific young navigator with a knowledge of marine surveying. Well, I have found him, and I have also found a gentleman."

Here I am afraid I blushed, and Trowel noticed it.

"Most important when dealing with these Straits-born Chinese, I assure you," he said. "Now you would probably take a few days longer over a voyage to begin with, for you would have to go easy at first. Those Natunas are the very devil; but when you get to know them, you'll be able to keep a regular time-table. Now what about it?"

The *Waihora's* first annual docking in the Straits had indeed been a lucky one for me; and for Mackay, who took my place as chief officer of a very happy home from home.

### III.

The net result of all our diplomatic manœuvring was that a fortnight later I stood on Johnston's Pier and hailed a sampan to take me off to the

*Flevo*, for I was just about to take that vessel to sea. Even up till then Teo Tao Peng had not got his father's approval for the change; and it was really Chester himself who had clinched the matter. That alcoholic mariner had been in such a state when he arrived from his last voyage that he had to be taken to hospital once more. To anticipate: He was eventually discharged from that institution to find to his surprise and indignation that his ship had left, commanded by a stranger, and that he was no longer required. For a few days he blustered and stormed, but his bluff had been called; and finding he was quite unemployable in the Straits, he drifted off to Bombay, and so right out of my yarn.

I had just left the office, prior to sailing, after a last interview with the young *towkay* and a first interview with the old one. The latter, who could speak no English, had tried to be nice to me; but I could feel that he had no confidence whatever, and that there was a measure of coldness between father and son over my appointment. Speaking in Malay, I promised the old chap faithfully that I would bring his steamer back safely, and roused his reluctant courtesy to such an extent that he offered me his hand before I left, though I must say his handshake was somewhat limp.

I got into a sampan and was pulled out to my steamer, which was fully loaded, with derricks down, all ready for sea. As I approached her, a feeling of pride in my first command rose within me. She seemed to grow on me; the first time



I had boarded her, in company with Trowel and Tao Peng, I realised that Trowel had been right—I could make her into a yacht. I mounted the accommodation ladder, asked the chief engineer, who came along the deck to meet me, if he was all ready, and, receiving an affirmative reply, went up on the bridge and put the engine-room telegraph to "stand-by." The signal was answered, and I shouted to the Malay gunner, who was on the forecastle-head by the windlass, to heave a-weigh.

Chester had left the *Flevo* in an inside berth—he had a reputation for picking out good berths—and, there being a drain at ebb-tide, she was heading toward the beach, though there was an on-shore breeze, and that was likely to make the process of turning her head to sea somewhat difficult. Her windlass, though powerful, was rather slow, and as the cable came in link by link, and I stood, inactive, on the bridge waiting for the signal from the gunner that the anchor was a-weigh, I was suddenly assailed by a feeling of nervousness. Such a feeling comes to most men when handling a vessel entirely on their own for the first time—some indeed never lose it—especially if they are lying in a crowded roadstead, aware that they are being watched by men from other ships. It is one thing to stand on a bridge and ring the telegraph to the orders of the captain or a pilot, at the same time thinking how much more smartly the manœuvre could be carried out; and quite another to carry it out one's self and be responsible for it.

I knew that a dozen pairs of eager eyes were

watching me ; for the news that there was a new master in the *Flevo*—a youngster not long out from home—had quickly spread. Beachcombers who had deserted their drinking lairs would, like others, be watching me and hoping for the worst ; indeed, I had learned from Trowel that they had already circulated a story that I had got command of the *Flevo* by accepting a much smaller salary than Chester was getting. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *towkays* could afford to pay big money and did ; few shipmasters sailing out of Singapore were as highly paid as I was—and I was still some years on the right side of thirty !

" this I thought of as I waited, and my thoughts ught Captain Daniel to my mind. How I wished ad his nerve and self-assurance ! It did not e me long to find out that I had both—in ample easure.

The gunner reported the cable up and down, and with the need for action every trace of nervousness left me—and never returned. There was little room in which to manœuvre, and as the Blue Peter came fluttering down from the fore truck to the deck, as a signal to all that the voyage had begun, I rang my first order to the engine-room. She was a handy vessel, and after a few movements of the engines ahead and astern, I felt I had got the hang of her. In a very short time I had her pointing to the outer roads, and she was gliding through the ranks of the anchored vessels, sampans and lighters, towards the open water of the Straits.



The tall buildings of Singapore and the shipping in the harbour melted into the misty distance; then the breeze died away completely and a dead calm ensued. I soon found that because of the refraction I had to watch my bearings very closely, for the shimmering atmosphere seemed to enlarge objects and make them appear much nearer than they actually were. Two small fishing-boats we passed loomed up like large vessels; and small islands and clumps of trees seemed to be floating well clear of the water. In the drooping heat even the jungle-clad coastline to the southward seemed to be floating, phantom-like, well above the glare of the sheltered glassy sea. Then it dawned on me that there was something very far wrong, something that refraction could not account for. On the chart I had laid off a course which should have taken the *Flevo* along the middle of the Strait; instead she persisted in closing the southern shore. There was no set of the tide to account for it; she was heading that way by compass.

I became suspicious. Could Chester have been playing tricks with the compass? Could he have had a premonition that his reign was about to come to an end? The suspicion became a certainty when the gunner, who had noticed that I was puzzled, asked in a somewhat apologetic way if the *Tuan* had remembered to put back the little blue and red pieces of iron. Blue and red? . . . of course, magnets! Chester had been monkeying with the compensating magnets! Further inquiry

revealed that he did this every time he got back to Singapore, but put them right just before he sailed. This seemed to indicate that if he had a premonition it was a permanent one! It may even have accounted for the "old stiff" running her on the rock; but it had been tried on quite the wrong man this time. At the navigation school I had lectured three times a week, with the aid of a contrivance called a deviascope, on which I demonstrated compass errors and how to compensate them; and I could safely be called an expert.

Before I could do anything, while I stood on the bridge in the intense heat, perspiring and pondering, a dimness came into the air which appeared to be stifling, and the weather looked uncertain and threatening. Presently dense clouds loomed up ahead, which gradually overspread the whole sky, and a thunderstorm, with vivid lightning, broke over the *Flevo*, rather unnerving to me in my loneliness. Having seen it coming, I had put the engines to slow and headed out well clear of the land; and could only hope I would not meet another vessel, for the rain fell in torrents so that I could hardly see the fore-castle-head.

Shortly afterwards it cleared, fell away calm again, and the heat seemed more intense than ever. Then on the southern horizon a darker tint appeared on the blue surface of the water, which remained, then grew larger and approached, and the welcome sea breeze, invigorating and refreshing,



was blowing over us, raising sparkling wavelets on the hitherto calm sea. Trowel had not exaggerated the usefulness of the awning overhead and the canvas screens round the bridge—I had not required my oilskin coat, and was as dry as a bone.

The squall had done more than cool the air; it had hardened the nearest coastline, and with many conspicuous landmarks to give me good bearings, and plenty of room, I decided to swing the ship for compass adjustment there and then, devoutly thankful I had noticed its unreliable state before the squall struck us and blotted out the land. The job took about an hour, but it was well worth it, for it gave me a wonderful sense of security throughout the rest of the voyage.

We resumed our progress to the eastward and I spent the next hour getting to know the more important members of the crew. The chief engineer, the only other officer on board, was a Eurasian; and from his name, which was d'Silva, and his complexion, which was swarthy, I judged him to be of mixed Malay and Portuguese descent. He had quite an imposing black moustache above a carefully shaven chin; and seemed to be good tempered and eager to please. He was obviously delighted with the change of masters, and I could not help feeling that Chester had on many occasions put the fear of death into him.

In the Malay gunner I felt I was particularly fortunate. He was an intelligent man and had made several voyages with Chester, and indeed had

just been sacked; for that wily mariner did not believe in carrying his gunners too long—they might get to know too much. This one assured me that, though he did not pretend to know the passages through the reefs, he could at least point out the anchorages at the various little ports. He spoke no English, but by that time I had a good working knowledge of the Malay language—or rather of the lingua franca that was current in the Archipelago and along the coasts of the Peninsula—and I realised that if I was stuck at any time I had a valuable ally in the engineer who, having been born and bred in Singapore, spoke the language like a native. The gunner's mate also seemed to be a reliable fellow; and since I could not be awake all the time, those two would keep the watches while I slept on a stretcher near the wheel.

Soon the black-and-white banded column of the Horsburgh lighthouse, at the eastern end of the Straits, loomed up, and I felt I had come to the end of my previous world. True, I had known the South China Sea through the *Waihora*, but beyond the Horsburgh, set on the reef called Pedra Branca, lay the hundreds and hundreds of islands of the Malay Archipelago; and among them those which I, as sole navigator, had to find and identify. The sun was just setting as I ran the Horsburgh abeam and set a course for the great towering rock of Pulo Domar, which I meant to use for my first landfall. The lighthouse came round till it was almost dead astern; and, silhouetted against the



FIRST COMMAND—*FLEVO*





western sky, with its light already burning, it made a lovely, clear-cut picture.

#### IV.

I remained on the bridge till we were clear of the traffic converging on the Horsburgh from the China and Java Seas, and having found that the gunner could take a compass bearing, in points and fractions of points, if not in degrees, I got him to take one of the light as it dipped. I then lay down after giving him orders to call me every two hours, and immediately on the near approach of another vessel. It had been a long day and, as I dozed, I felt certain I could trust either of the gunners.

After the heat and glare of daylight in the Straits it was deliciously cool on the spacious, darkened bridge. It was calm again, but the ship was making a nice little breeze as she moved through the water. The gunner's mate had the watch; and, as he moved about barefooted, the only sound was when he spoke in an undertone to the Malay at the wheel. Before I dropped off I opened a sleepy eye and saw the pair by the light of the binnacle lamp. I watched the gunner relieving his mate at midnight, then knew no more till, about two o'clock, he called me to say he had sighted Pulo Domar a little on the starboard bow; just where it should

have been—another good mark for the recently adjusted compass.

I told him to let me know when it was drawing abeam, when I would get up and alter course for my first port in the Anambas, a little place on the island of Jimaja. The chart lay on a desk to which a hood had been fitted, in case rain should seep through the awning; but as I had laid off the course before I lay down I did not require a lamp. Pulo Domar was about two miles distant when abeam; and except that its high summit seemed to be in light, fleecy cloud, it stood out clearly in the moonlight. Already I had acquired the happy knack of dropping off promptly when no longer required; and I was sleeping soundly when the gunner, seemingly agitated, called me again. "*Tuan, tuan!*" he said, and there was urgency in his voice.

I was on my feet and standing beside him in less than half a minute. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"There's a fighting ship chasing us, *tuan!*" he said. He shoved my binoculars into my hand and pointed out on the starboard quarter. The ship I could see there had come out from behind Pulo Domar and had been converging on us ever since. My binoculars revealed to me what his battered old brass pair had revealed to him, that she was no merchant vessel. She had two funnels, her bridge was built up, and she had a fighting-top half-way up her foremast.



That I felt inclined to panic when I realised this may be put down to an association of ideas. The latest news of the Russian Baltic fleet to reach Singapore, the day before I left, was that it had been sighted not far from the west coast of Sumatra ; and this had inspired a strong leading article in the 'Straits Times' recalling the "action" by certain units of that fleet off the Dogger Bank.

I found it necessary to take a strong grip on myself, for there was a native crew to be considered ; and already I could detect a good deal of uneasiness about the gunners, while the helmsman was continually glancing over his shoulder. I remember thinking, at first, that I had no more reason for panic than those Russian officers had ; but it would not do. After all, half the world lay between Japan and the Dogger Bank ; only the length of the China Sea between Vladivostok and Pulo Domar. And what about the Japs ? Might they not be just as quick on the trigger as their opponents ? The strange steamer was coming on inexorably ; her bearing did not vary a degree.

I thought of my guarantee to the old *towkay*, that, without fail, I would bring the *Flevo* back to Singapore. Would I have given that guarantee so readily had it occurred to me that I might meet a jumpy Russian cruiser, or for that matter, a petulantly and imperiously impatient Japanese one ? A voice spoke from the bottom of the bridge ladder. "May I come up, captain ?" it said.

It was the chief engineer, and I was pleased, for

in such an emergency I would be glad to speak my own tongue. "Certainly," I cried to him.

He joined me, and it was good to note that there was no trace of panic about him; instead, he was phlegmatic, and his very speech seemed to epitomise his phlegm. In the manner of his kind all over the East, his sentences flowed monotonously in sing-song cadences, words and sentences interlocked at a dead level; his phrases were strangely fashioned, but somehow they seemed to soothe my nerves.

He knew about the Russians being seen off Sumatra and had read the article in the Singapore newspaper, but it had left him cold; for strange as it seemed to me, it was the Japanese he detested and was afraid of. For my part, if the *Flevo* were to be sunk, it did not matter much by whom, except that the Japs would probably make a quicker and cleaner job of it.

Anxious though we were, we discussed the matter quite dispassionately, after we had agreed that the strange fighting ship that was dogging us could not possibly bode us any good. He said he had been running around the islands for three years and had never seen a steamboat of *any* kind within forty miles of any of them; and, just as he spoke, the gunner reported the first of the Anambas in sight right ahead.

"What can he be waiting for?" I said; the question being torn from me in some agony of mind.



"For daylight, sir," the engineer said.

"It won't be long now," I said, pointing to the starboard beam where there was a distinct brightness in the sky. The strange vessel, which we could now see was a light cruiser, increased speed and became silhouetted against the brightness. I could see, on her bridge, a group of white-clad officers staring through glasses; and whatever else they were, they were certainly not Japs—and almost equally certain, not Russians. Along the starboard bulwark on the *Flevo's* fore-deck, where most of the hands had gathered, there was a tense silence, save for an occasional nervous cough. "The eye of day!" the gunner exclaimed. It was the picturesque Malay expression for the sun, the upper rim of which was just glinting above the horizon.

As he spoke, a bundle like a dark ball went swinging aloft to the stranger's peak, and the moment the lower rim of the great red ball of fire rose clear, the bundle at the peak was broken and from it there fluttered, then blew out clear on the breeze, a blue, red, and white ensign! "*Negri Blandi!*" rose in a chorus of relief from the fore-deck.

"*Negri Blandi!*" the gunner exclaimed.

"Why, she is Dutch, sir!" the engineer cried.

"And why not? They're Dutch islands, aren't they?" I said with a nonchalance I certainly did not feel.

"I have often wondered if the Dutch knew it,

sir," the engineer said with a tone which I felt was meant to be mildly sarcastic.

The gunner dashed aft to hoist our Red Ensign, and a couple of minutes later the Dutch ship, as if satisfied, turned away. Although she had given me an extraordinarily bad half-hour, I had to be polite, so ordered the gunner to dip to her. The cruiser punctiliously dipped in response and stood away to the south-eastward; while I turned my attention to the island which was growing up ahead.

Jimaja is one of the highest islands in the group; at its northern end it rises to nearly 1600 feet, and as it grew larger I studied it intently through the long telescope, pausing occasionally to consult the chart which lay handy on the desk. When Trowel said there was a good chart of the Anambas he did it scant justice. It was an excellent chart, compiled from a survey made by H.M.S. *Egeria* only a few years before; and I felt that, with my compass in perfect order, I could have gone anywhere in the group with it.

At first the island seemed to be simply a mass of rock and green vegetation; then as it grew larger and disintegrated I could see many cleared patches in the jungle, coconut plantations, and an occasional hut. Well, here was my island, rising out of the narrow green belt of sea that broke over an encircling reef; now, where was my port? There were no real ports in the Anambas, not a single place that contained even the simplest appliance of a port,



but the chart showed a small village about half a mile up a narrow bay. Such a village now lay right ahead, and I could see a narrow blue channel leading from seaward into the bay.

I called the gunner up on the bridge and got from him my first lesson in the identification of harbours in the islands. He pointed to three *tongkangs*—or native cargo boats—lying off the village, and to a great heap of copra standing beside it, and said those were infallible guides. It seemed that they indicated a port just as surely as a row of warehouses and electric cranes would in more civilised places.

The gunner stayed on the bridge with me while I headed for the channel leading inward; got safely through it with the aid of the varying colours of the sea; and stood up the bay. "This place is easy, *tuan*," he said. "Head in for the *tongkangs*, and when the leadsman gives five fathoms, anchor."

"Right; stand by the windlass," I said to him.

I slowed the engines, then stopped them, and let the steamer glide on and begin to lose her way. Perhaps in my caution I did not venture quite so close as to get five fathoms, for the beach of snow-white coral sand began to look horribly near. I put the engines half-speed astern, and the wash from the propeller came creaming forward. The leadline in the leadsman's hands came slack and led up and down; all the way was off. "Let go!" I shouted to the gunner.

The deep hush that brooded over that beautiful

little bay was rudely disturbed as the anchor splashed into the clear, calm water, and rippled the surface into a thousand reflected shapes; the chain cable rattled out through the hawse-pipe and the sound brought hundreds of pigeons circling round the tops of the jungle trees just beyond the cultivated belt. I stopped the engines, and the *Flevo*, drifting back, tightened the cable. "Brought up, *tuan*!" the gunner shouted from forward.

I had made my first port and felt that I had anchored in a smart, seamanlike manner; in fact, just at that moment I was in danger of getting a little bit above myself. A cold douche administered mildly by a very mild individual brought me to my senses. I rang off the engines and descended the bridge in search of a bath and breakfast, and on my way along the lower bridge met Mr d'Silva.

"Well, chief," I said cheerfully, "if it's all as easy as this we'll have little trouble."

"Sir," Mr d'Silva said with a deprecating smile, "if it was, Captain Chester would not have reigned as long as he did."

## V.

The *towkay's* Chinese representative came off in a small *prahu* to pay his respects, and a little later one of the *tongkangs* came alongside. The steam winch at the main-hatch clattered noisily; cargo



was being discharged already. Just before lunch I heard a somewhat timid knock on my open door. The caller was Mr d'Silva. "May I come in, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly; come in and sit down," I answered heartily.

"I noticed that you had a gun-case among your baggage, sir, and I was hoping you were fond of shooting," he said.

"I am, when I get the chance," I said.

"Well, sir, there is very good pigeon shooting on this island, and I wondered if you would care for a shoot this afternoon. I could take you to one of the best places, and it is not very far from the beach. Captain Chester often shot here, sir."

"Was he a good shot?"

Mr d'Silva coughed nervously. "I hardly like to say it, but much depended on the degree of his sobriety, sir."

"Did you go out often with him?"

"That again depended on the degree of his sobriety, sir. You see, I am a married man with three children."

"H'm! not very safe, obviously," I said. "Are you fond of shooting?"

The rapt expression that came over his face and the shine in his eyes told me more than his quiet "Oh, yes, sir." It was as if someone had asked Mr John Jorrocks, M.F.H. of Handley Cross, if he was fond of foxhunting. "Can I see your gun, sir?" he asked.

"Of course; there it is."

He took the gun out of the case, fitted it together like an expert, then ran his eye lovingly down one of the barrels. "There's a little rust here, sir. I'll take it down and have it cleaned," he said. "I'm saving up to buy a new one, but cannot hope to get as good a one as this."

"What time should we start this afternoon?" I asked.

"It is better to be there about five o'clock, sir. The sun is low then, and the birds are returning from their feeding grounds. You get some very pretty shooting when they come in high over the coconut trees where they roost."

It was then I realised what a sportsman the little man was. I had thought he would be shooting for the pot and would prefer sitting shots; yet here he was, talking enthusiastically about high, difficult ones. I thought it might be due to his Malay ancestry; for though the average Malay may be a somewhat lazy fellow when at work, put him in the jungle after game, or on the sea after fish, and you have an entirely different man. "With your permission, sir, I'll tell the gunner to have the gig ready at half-past four. That is the boat we always used," he said.

Punctually at half-past four we got into the gig, manned by two Malays, and made for the beach, which was only two minutes' row distant after all. Half-way there I turned to look at the *Flevo*, and caught my breath because of the beauty of the



scene. The surface of the little bay was like glass, and we could see the bottom right in to the beach. The *Flevo* was mirrored in it, and what a picture she made! With all his faults, Chester was a seaman, and he had always taken care of his ship. The *towkays* spared no expense in the way of stores for her; she was always freshly painted, and her brasswork glittered.

The light gig glided on to where the crystal wavelets lapped the shore, and we stepped dry-shod on to coral sand that glistened like snow. We made for the coconut palms and there came to our nostrils a whiff of sweet, somewhat sickly scent. It came from a large heap of copra—dried coconuts—which some natives were shovelling into open wickerwork baskets ready for a *tongkang* to take off to the *Flevo*. It was all very primitive; as we passed, the workers stood around and bowed deeply.

We entered a very fine plantation; the tall, straight trees were laden with green coconuts, and we had to walk a quarter of a mile before we came to the fringe where cultivation and jungle trees met. "Now, sir, we may get a shot at any moment," d'Silva said.

I looked at the gun he was carrying at the ready. It was little wonder he envied me mine, which was a modern, hammerless, self-ejector. His was certainly double-barrelled, but that was about all that could be said for it. It was an old-fashioned hammer gun, and obviously the stock had been

cracked, for it was heavily bound with copper wire.

A lot of rustling came from the palm fronds as the first of the birds came over. They were something like our wood-pigeons at home, and were flying very fast; but it was the unexpectedness of their movements that defeated me. Almost as soon as I got a glimpse of one, it was out of sight; and d'Silva had four on the ground before I even fired a shot. His gun might have been an anachronism, but he could certainly handle it; and he showed me such consideration that I could not feel jealous, though I could not get going and had a few bad misses. At last quite a nice right and left brought down two high birds and gave me confidence, and soon I was enjoying myself.

The sun was now so low that I felt it must be on the point of setting; and as there were no beaten tracks through the plantation we decided it was time to go back. Just then a slight rustle among the fronds swelled to something like a roar. "Mark over!" d'Silva yelled. I threw up the muzzle of my gun as, like a bolt from the blue, a much larger bird flashed across the clearing. I must have hit it, for some feathers flew. A couple of seconds later d'Silva fired and the bird crashed to the ground, twenty yards farther on. "Sorry, sir, I did not mean to wipe your eye," the engineer said, "but I knew you were using number six, which won't stop a *rawang*, and I had just time to slip a number four into my choke barrel."



He had been wonderfully quick about it, and the *rawang* was a beautiful pigeon which I would have been sorry to have lost. It was nearly as large as a well-grown hen ; but d'Silva assured me that on one of the Natunas there were pure white pigeons as big as turkeys, and just as delicious to eat. A cheerful note on which to make our way through the plantation toward the ship, with our boatmen carrying fourteen plump wood-pigeons and a *rawang*.

It was a fitting end to a glorious afternoon of freedom and sport, and a very happy augury for the future. Sleep came that night without effort ; and I dreamed of rights and lefts at white pigeons as large as turkeys.

## VI.

By nine o'clock next morning we had discharged our inward cargo and loaded about forty tons of copra, and were ready to leave for our next port, which was in the island of Siantan, some seventy miles away. It was already obvious to me that the *towkays* had organised a fine system for working cargo at Jimaja ; and according to Trowel, in all the islands. It was entirely their own cargo we carried—copra with some sago outward, general cargo such as groceries in.

Sure of the compass and the chart, and with a good azimuth mirror with which to take bearings,

navigating around the Anambas was a pure joy ; and as an additional safeguard, once the sun was well up the dangers could usually be seen. There were five more small ports at which I had to call ; and though none was quite as simple as the first, they were by no means difficult, though each had a special feature of its own. The one that gave me most trouble had no outlying dangers—in fact it had no dangers at all. It lay at the inner end of a long bay, which was entered through a narrow passage between high cliffs, and so steep were the shores that most of the bay was in shadow.

I located the port in the usual way and stood towards it. The leadsman got into position and took a few casts, but the line ran through his hands without a sign of a check. What to do ? One cannot drop an anchor into a bottomless sea ! I seemed to have found one of those places in the Archipelago where the sea deepens to two or three thousand fathoms ; at least, imagination suggested that. I never did get the bottom with the lead ; I made the gunner walk back the windlass till there was forty-five fathoms of cable out, and when the anchor eventually caught, the *Flevo* was right alongside the beach. With the cable trending slightly to seaward, I felt I could heave her off readily ; but, all the same, I was glad to get away again before sunset.

It was all most absorbing and, of course, valuable experience. Another port lay in a wide lagoon, entirely surrounded by reefs, through which there



was a short but narrow channel. I waited till the sun was well up before I went into that one ; for though I was aided to a certain extent by the gunner, it was to the transparency of the sea that I mostly trusted. Once the morning glare was off the water the presence of most of the sunken reefs could be detected by the colour of the sea, which depended on the depth. The deeper the water the darker blue it showed ; where it shoaled it became light in colour ; while very shallow water over a coral reef showed a pale green.

I gained more confidence every day. On one passage between two of my ports I found that by going through a narrow strait between two islands I could save nearly fifty miles in distance. The strait was about twenty miles long, and in some places less than a cable-length wide, but I took it without hesitation. I entered it just after noon on a day of brilliant sunshine : at first it stretched away to the north-eastward almost like a canal, so straight were its banks. I soon got the impression that the *Flevo* was moving along an avenue bordered by tall coconut trees, and I could hear the fronds rustling to the breeze as we passed between them.

The centre of the strait was a brilliant blue, and it was lined on both sides by ribbons of bottle green where the water shoaled. Alongside the banks and almost up to the trees it was a delicate shade of pale green, which melted into a creamy foam where the water broke lazily on the fringes

of cultivated ground. The long parallel lines ahead—the blue of the deep water, the green of the shoal, the creamy foam, the dark-brown boles of the palms, and the emerald green of their graceful fronds—stood out in exquisite clarity in the bright sunshine. Enchanted, I stood beside the helmsman, conning the vessel along the centre of the channel, and giving my orders in little more than a whisper, as if afraid that words of mine might break the spell.

Suddenly, I had a curious and unpleasant feeling that I was somewhere else. I was back on board the *Waihora*, recalled by the strident chiming of a bell which one of the passengers had fitted to his camphor-wood chest. So abruptly had the spell caused by the witchery of the scene been broken that it took me a moment or two to collect my senses. Then I saw d'Silva, the gunner, and some men running aft. Next I noticed a long, pliant bamboo sticking out between the ratlines of the starboard main rigging, to which it was attached, and whipping about like a demented fishing-rod. It *was* a fishing-rod; a great bar of silver leapt six feet out of the wake, and fell back again with a great splash, while the quivering bamboo bent like a hoop.

It took me some little time to connect the bell, the running men, the whipping bamboo, and the leaping fish; then I understood at least part of it. The fish had been hooked, and the line holding it was leading from the top of the bamboo to where



it struggled fiercely out on the starboard quarter. I wondered what sort of fishing-line it was that would hold a fish with the vessel doing nearly ten knots; then I saw that it consisted of stout lead-line. I also saw Mr d'Silva staring hard at me, and formed an impression that he would like me to slow down, but did not dare to ask.

I should think not, indeed. I felt very angry; the whole thing was the negation of all good order. What right had they to rig up gear like that, then run away from whatever work they were doing? I should have to speak very severely, in private, to Mr d'Silva, who, I was sure, was the master mind, and read the riot act to the gunner and the others. If they got away with this, and did such things without my permission, there would soon be an end to discipline on board.

The fish was lashing about furiously; the strain on rod and line was such that I felt something must go; my sporting instincts got the better of me and I rang the engines to slow. Half a dozen pairs of eager eyes turned to the bridge in gratitude and I could see some of the strain come off the line. But I felt ridiculous. The idea of a ship-master slowing the engines of a ship making a passage to allow the engineer, or anybody else, to pull in a fish *was* ridiculous; I would soon put my foot down with a firm thump.

The gunner reached well outboard and got a boathook round the still vibrating line, which he slipped into a lead on the rail, so that all the assembled

hands could get a pull on it. The fish seemed to have been played almost to a standstill, which was just as well, for the last couple of fathoms of the line consisted of steel wire, which was likely to cut to pieces the hands that tried to lift a struggling fish over the rail. They did not do it that way, however; the gunner slipped a running bowline round the fish, just above its tail, and it was dropped on the deck. I rang the engines to full speed again.

Presently a small procession appeared at the after-end of the lower bridge. It consisted of the gunner, two seamen carrying a fish which must have weighed round about sixty pounds, and the grinning d'Silva. I reckoned I would soon wipe the grin off his face, but fortunately I allowed him to speak first. "Here is a present from Captain Chester, sir," he said.

"A present from Captain Chester!" I repeated in astonishment. "Whatever do you mean? I thought *you* were responsible for it all."

"Oh, no, sir; I am only responsible for the bell," he said modestly.

On inquiry, I found that d'Silva's statement about the fish being a present from Captain Chester was not very far from being the truth. Chester had evolved the idea of catching big fish in that way, and all the gear belonged to him. He had discovered that there was a lie for a large fish half-way along the strait, and the gunner had a standing order to rig the gear and have everything ready on the morning of the day the *Flevo* was due to enter



it. The reason why I had not noticed the bamboo rod, which was used to keep the fishing-line clear of the propeller, was because it was fastened up and down one of the starboard backstays by light twine stops.

As soon as a fish was hooked the stops broke and the rod fell into position. The large hook was baited with a piece of red bunting; and as a matter of routine the gunner dropped this over the stern and streamed the line just before the ship entered the strait. Obviously he could hardly be blamed for looking upon this as a standing order which was still in existence in spite of the change of masters. All was well that ended well; no disciplinary action was necessary; and all hands, including myself, had a good feed of fresh fish. "And what was the idea of the bell for which you say you were responsible?" I asked the engineer.

"That rang when the stops broke, sir," he answered. "It warned the captain to ring the telegraph to stop the engines!"

That was a fitting finish, for the time being, to the carefree navigation of the *Anambas*, for the next day I would come on to the chart of the *Natunas*. After dinner that night I got it out and studied it; and the more I studied it, the less I liked it. Trowel had been right; the survey, done by the Dutch, dated back to 1811; and the chart fairly bristled with reefs, many uncharted to the extent that they were marked P.D.—"position doubtful"

—or even E.D.—“existence doubtful.” I had to remember also that they were probably extending, for they were mostly coral reefs, and coral grows.

By far the most difficult port to approach in either of the groups was Sedanau, in the Great Natuna Island. I told the *chinchew* to bring up his cargo manifest; and it confirmed what I feared, that the *Flevo* carried more cargo into and out of Sedanau than she did at all the other ports put together; and that meant she would be at her maximum draft. There was only one village marked on the chart and I assumed it must be Sedanau. The bay on which it stood looked simply ghastly; in fact I could not find a way through the reefs even with a pencil. I sent down for d'Silva. “Would you say that Sedanau was a difficult place to reach?” I asked him.

“Oh, terrible, sir; I do not know how you will manage it.”

“The gunner tells me he knows Captain Chester's marks,” I said.

A look of horror came into d'Silva's eyes. “Sir,” he cried, “nobody can possibly know Captain Chester's marks. Once in Singapore I heard him boasting to one of his drinking companions that the navigation marks he put up would bamboozle the Hydrographer Royal himself—whoever *he* might be, sir.”

“They won't bamboozle *me*, thanks to your warning; and I'll get there, somehow,” I said.

And I meant it.



## VII.

I sighted Great Natuna Island just as the sun rose behind it, and a few minutes later discovered why Sedanau was by far my busiest port. On the island, which was a large one, there was not a single strip of jungle to be seen; as far as my vision extended there were coconut trees—millions of them. I remembered that Trowel had hinted that once the *towkays* got rid of Chester they hoped greatly to extend their trade, and probably buy another, and bigger, vessel; and if they did it would be round Great Natuna that the extension would take place.

I next discovered why there was no port on the western side of the island, which would have been far more convenient. An almost solid barrier of reefs, as shown by light-green water and breaking surf, rose right out of the blue, parallel with the shore. I turned the *Flevo's* head to starboard and stood slowly to the southward, keeping a safe distance off the reef. The south end of the island drew abeam, and just clear of it there appeared a stout pole with a short plank fixed across it near the top. Its base seemed to be embedded in the reef, which extended farther south, and I presumed it to be the first of Chester's marks. We should have to round it to go up the bay on the other side of the island. "Can I pass close round it?" I asked the gunner.

"No, *tuan*," he answered, with an uncertain smile, which might have indicated that now he was up against the job, he was not quite so sure of himself. Puzzled, I called d'Silva to come up. He corroborated my idea that Sedanau was on the other side of the island and that we had to go round the point to get into the bay on which it stood. "I'm not a navigator, of course," he added, "but I am certain the entrance to the channel up the bay is a quarter of a mile farther from the point than that beacon seems to show."

He was an intelligent fellow, and I was sorry he was an engineer, not a navigator. Engineers have their uses, of course; but I was certain that his smooth-running engines did not need him at that moment as much as I did. "Well," I said to him, "a ship's keel is the wrong instrument with which to take soundings. I shall anchor and go in with the boat."

"That would be better, sir; you cannot be too careful with this place," he said.

The edge of the reef was plainly visible, so I stood about a quarter of a mile to the southward from the point, edged in close, and anchored with a short scope of cable; I then climbed to the foremast-head, with my binoculars slung round my neck and a large sketching-block under my arm, and got into a boatswain's chair which the gunner lashed up there for me. My first reward after I had settled in the chair was the sight of Sedanau, as I felt it must be. It lay about two miles to the



northward and was conspicuous enough. There was a large village consisting of native houses standing on stilts, what looked like small mountains of copra, and more than the usual number of *long-kangs*. Yes, there was my port; now how to get there?

At once I realised that I was up against one of the most severe tests I had ever been faced with. If that bay had looked nasty on the chart, it looked ten times nastier in the flesh, so to speak. Everywhere there was the ugly bottom-glint of coral; with here an outcrop of jagged rock, there one of Chester's useless, misleading beacons. Already the sun was well up and the water was so clear that I could see the anchor lying on the bottom, with the slack cable leading to it from the hawse-pipe.

I hardly knew where to start, but decided to do *something*. I sketched in the coastline with the approximate position of the village which, owing to the height of my chair up the mast, was showing clearly over the tops of the intervening palms; then with my glasses I tried to trace the channel leading to it. I knew there *must* be a channel, for only a month before the *Flevo* had loaded a full cargo at Sedanau. In the bay there were veins of darker green water, and even of blue; the job was to connect them. Right ahead of where the anchor lay there was quite a considerable blue patch, which might well mark the entrance to the channel; and it was, as d'Silva had suggested, a quarter of a mile south of Chester's mark. I made

a mental note of that. Obviously the engineer knew more than his modesty allowed him to admit.

Patiently I traced the blue or dark-green ribbon that meandered up the bay, and found that with one exception Chester's marks had no connection with it. The exception was a notable one, and I concluded that it was one Chester himself could not have done without. It marked a right-angled bend that led from well off-shore right in to the village, and seemed to consist of a whole coconut tree without its fronds. He could not have got it there with his own boat and men; he must have borrowed a *tongkang* and a gang of men from the headman of the village.

It was rather pleasant sitting up there in the chair, and I lingered thinking out my plans. I intended to make a large-scale chart of the port and its approaches; but the immediate job was to mark the channel so that I could use it. It would take me a week if I were to use boles of trees as Chester had done; what about buoing it? I descended from the chair and sought out d'Silva. "Have you any old fire-bars?" I asked him.

"Yes, sir, plenty," he answered. "Why?"

"I'm going to mark the channel—when I find it—with buoys instead of beacons. Home-made buoys of bits of stout planks, moored with seizing wire to fire-bars. There isn't a strong current in there; nor is there likely to be a heavy sea to wash them away."

He was prepared to be co-operative. "I could



give you some good planks, sir. I have been dismantling a temporary bulkhead in the cross-bunker, and the planks were coated with coal tar, so should show up well in the green water."

"Splendid! Could you have them cut up into three-foot lengths and get your men to put them into the boat?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I noticed a new coil of seizing wire being stowed away the other day. If I get the gunner to bring it along could you cut some of it up into lengths, too?"

"What length, sir?"

"Ah! there you've got me," I said. "It would depend on the depths at the edges of the channel, wouldn't it?"

"Then, sir, if you will excuse me for suggesting it—wouldn't it be better if I came in the boat with a file and cut off the lengths as required?"

I believe that was the chance he had been waiting for. "Would you like to come in the boat?" I asked.

"Of course, sir," he cried heartily.

"Good! We'll shove off as soon as we get the boat loaded up," I said.

I put a large sheet of drawing-paper, my sextant, my stop-watch, a notebook, a compass, and a protractor into the boat; and while I waited for the planks, the fire-bars, a jar of water and some food to be placed in the boat, I drew a rough scale on the paper. At last everything was ready and we pushed off, sure of but one thing—we were in

for a long, hot, and trying day. How rough the survey was going to be can be judged from the fact that we had no means of measuring short distances—such as the width of the channel; distances that on shore would have been measured by two men with a surveyor's chain, or at the worst by careful pacing. The only distance *we* were sure of was the length of the *Flevo* herself, and from that we worked out the speed of the boat.

Rough work! If ever a survey started from scratch, ours did that bright morning off Great Natuna Island!

### VIII.

With four Malay seamen at the oars, another one sounding with a light lead, and the gunner at the tiller, we set out to look for the gap in the reef; and soon found it. The sea was like glass, and there were no breakers to help us, but we could see the bottom most of the time. At the edge of the channel on the port hand going in we laid our first buoy, d'Silva cutting off the length of wire required and fastening it to a fire-bar, which he dropped on the bottom. We then headed the boat across the channel and, while it was pulled at a steady pace, I timed it by the stop-watch till we came to the reef on the opposite side, where we laid our second buoy. The sight of the two black



planks floating there gave me quite a thrill. First blood! we had successfully marked the entrance to the port!

We found the width of the channel there to be a little over a hundred yards, which, of course, was more than ample; but d'Silva assured me that it would not all be like that. At one part, about two miles ahead, just beyond where the channel took the right-angled turn, very careful steering was required, for the ship would be within a few feet of dangerous coral on both sides. I was anxious to get the exact distance to Chester's conspicuous beacon, for then I would have a base line from which, by bearings and sextant angles, I could accurately fix various objects on shore, as well as the exact position of the ship close to the entrance to the channel.

I soon found another job for d'Silva, besides laying the various channel buoys as we proceeded; as I took various compass bearings and sextant angles and sketched in the outline of the channel, he wrote them in the notebook for me in his neat copperplate writing. The glare on the water was now blinding and the heat terrific. By the time we reached Chester's stout bole and tied up to it, we had laid seven buoys—four on the south side of the channel, three on the other; and I felt we had done enough for the time being; also lunch was indicated.

We did not take long over it, for I wanted to see what the channel was like beyond the beacon

—which, as I had thought, marked a bend—and, if possible, to buoy it. It was really bad, narrow and complicated, and we had to lay five more buoys before I considered I could be sure of taking the *Flevo* safely through it. By the time we had done this our supply of planks and fire-bars was exhausted, and I was by no means sorry, for so was I. We went back to the bole and tied up to it, so that the men could eat the little food that was left and have a rest before starting on the long pull home.

While they ate, I worked at the chart, and with the protractor added the town to the other positions I had laid off. The bearings and angles fitted in well; already the chart was beginning to look workmanlike—then there came a minor disaster. As I bent over the chart a great blob of perspiration rolled off my brow, dropped on the chart, and blotted out the town. A second blob dropped and swamped half the coastline; and an attempt at drying with a handkerchief already almost sodden, only made matters worse. Consternation! then I felt like kicking myself, as I would gladly have kicked any other congenital idiot! For the proper place on which to construct a chart was the chart-table on the *Flevo's* comfortable bridge, not the stern-sheets of a moving boat; and I had all the angles, bearings, and measurements safe in the notebook!

We cast the painter off the bole and headed the boat into the setting sun while the men settled



themselves on the thwarts and started on a long, steady stroke. As I sat in the stern-sheets, feeling cramped and uncomfortable after all those hours, I heard what sounded like a faint combined hail. We looked across the water and saw that what must have been half the population of the town had gathered down on the beach. They must have thought we were running away from them, and were trying to call us back. It was little wonder they were puzzled ; for all the mails for the islands were carried by the *Flevo*, and they would not know there had been a change of captain. Well, they would have to wait till to-morrow.

The lower limb of the sun was just about to touch the horizon as the boat drew alongside ; and the sunset bottles of beer fresh from the ice-chest, which d'Silva and I shared, were among the most welcome I ever tasted.

After a bath and a good dinner I got down to the task of preparing my chart. I used a fresh sheet of stout drawing-paper, and as I worked with protractor and dividers the pride of craftsmanship swelled within me. Angles, bearings, and distances checked and cross-checked each other ; and I could honestly say that I had spared no pains to ensure the one thing without which no chart, however beautifully drawn, has any value — accuracy. Subconsciously, I paid it a great tribute : even if all our buoys were washed away I would be prepared to take the *Flevo* into Sedanau on the chart alone !

It was not yet finished, of course ; the stretch

of the channel from what I had named Chester's bend had still to be completed ; when it was, I would finish it off with Indian ink and show it to Trowel as evidence that my claim had been genuine.

There was always a dewy freshness about the dawn among the islands, and it was deliciously cool next morning as I sat under the bridge awning, drinking my morning coffee and eating buttered toast. Except for one place, there was tropical beauty wherever I looked. To the westward the sea was like blue enamel ; to the eastward, on the other side of the bay, there were miles and miles of coconut palms ; to the south-west there were more islands, emerald green, set in a delicate pearly haze. But to the north-eastward was that dreadful bay, with its ugly coral-glint ; and I shuddered as I thought I would have to spend another part of a baking day exploring it. I had acquired a loathing of coral, which I still have.

To begin with there would be the long, weary pull out to Chester's Bend before we could even start work . . . or was there ? My hand, which held a banana, stopped half-way to my mouth. " You silly ass ! " I exclaimed—and no wonder ! More than half the channel leading to the town had been surveyed and marked—why not use it ? Why not take the *Flevo* along to the bend, anchor her, and carry on in the boat from there ? D'Silva seemed to be surprised when I rang the " stand by " on the telegraph, but the signal was answered within a minute. I could see some of the boatmen



grinning as the gunner hove the anchor up, and I headed the *Flevo* between the first of the buoys.

Before those came abeam we had picked up the next two ahead, and I stood confidently up the channel. We reached the bole, anchored, and lowered the boat. As they were putting the gear in it, the gunner said something that sounded very hopeful: he thought three buoys would be sufficient—two to mark the channel where it reached the lagoon on which Sedanau stood, the other a fairway buoy over a rock in the middle of the channel about a quarter of a mile on. D'Silva, who was waiting to get into the boat, confirmed this. "I really think the back of the work is well broken, sir, and that we will be at anchor in the lagoon by the time the sun goes down," he said.

As we passed the ugly part of the channel I checked up on the buoys we had laid the previous evening, for we had all been pretty well dead beat and might have made mistakes. They were all right, however, and once we cleared them we set off at a good speed toward the town, which was almost right ahead. We found the sunken rock lurking treacherously with about six feet of water over it, and marked it with two large planks in the shape of a cross and a double mooring; then we set off again on what promised to be the last lap. It was, and it took us to within about three hundred yards of the town. We laid our buoys, then returned to the ship for lunch. This was surveying in luxury.

After lunch, we hoisted the boat, hove up, and proceeded. I was pleased to note that with careful steering we negotiated the bad part of the channel nicely, though the coral was uncomfortably close at times and we had to slow down. Just after we passed the fairway buoy I blew a prolonged blast on the steam whistle, and could see a number of people leaving their houses and making for the beach. As I had done at Jimaja, I went in on the lead, and anchored close enough to please the crews of the *tongkangs*, who were watching.

The Chinese agent for the *towkays* came on board and the *chinchew* brought him up to see me. The visit was really in the nature of an ocular demonstration; for the agent had flatly refused to believe that any shipmaster but Chester could have brought the *Flevo* to Sedanau. His surprise when he actually saw me, and realised that I was, in his estimation, little more than a boy, was genuine and unbounded.

An hour later the sun set on a very happy young shipmaster.

## IX.

For breakfast next morning I had the most delicious fried fish—fish so beautifully flavoured that I could hardly believe they had been caught in tropical waters. Before the sun had risen the tireless d'Silva had gone off in a native boat to the edge of the reef, taking with him his light rod.



He had two rods—a heavy one for trolling for fish such as the one we caught in the strait; the other for smaller fish such as I had just eaten, which seemed to be a kind of red mullet.

Later, while the winches rattled, the cargo work went on at all the hatches and the *tongkangs* plied busily between the ship and the shore, I worked comfortably at my chart. When it was completed I went to the binnacle and took cross-bearings of three of the principal positions I had plotted on the chart—the sunken rock, Chester's beacon off the point, and the one at the bend. The lines of bearings intersected off the town just where the *Flevo* lay; and there could not possibly have been a more satisfactory result!

I had just finished and gone down to my cabin when the *chinchew* came to tell me that I had been requested to go on the beach to meet the headman of the town and half a dozen other notables. Taking d'Silva with me in case I found my Malay inadequate, I went ashore in the gig. I believe I came through the ordeal well; but really the innate courtesy of those simple islanders made the function a very pleasant one. We wound up by drinking the sweet refreshing juice from green coconuts in the headman's house.

After that, tidying up my cabin and unpacking my books—for this was the first real chance I had had since I came on board—kept me busy till tea; when I decided to call it a day, lie back on a long chair on the bridge, and do some reading.

But I had not reckoned on that indefatigable sportsman, the engineer. This was one of the islands where the large white pigeons could be found, and one of their fighting places was about a mile along the beach. A nice little walk before dinner; we could get there for the start of the evening flight: what about it?

We landed and set off along the beach where the tall coconut trees were already casting their shadows. We had only gone a couple of hundred yards when two Malays carrying guns came out of the trees. I was surprised; for although I had learned that Dutch control in the islands was pretty sketchy, I had not expected to meet armed natives. They were wild-looking fellows, but they greeted us and we discovered we all belonged to the same firm. The *towkays* employed them to keep down the squirrels, which did a lot of damage to the trees. They walked along with us and we examined each other's weapons. My hammerless gun puzzled them; their muzzle-loading old blunderbusses frightened me; I would not have fired one for the promise of a pension.

We had just reached the fighting place when the Malays revealed the real reason for intercepting us. At one plantation, a couple of miles away at the head of the bay, but easily reached by boat, wild pigs were doing a great deal of damage. Could we help them? On any night when there was a moon they could give us good sport. D'Silva's eyes shone; *he* would help *anybody* who would



give him good sport ! But we had to decline the offer. We had nothing more powerful than number four shot, and number four would do nothing to a pig but tickle him. The idea of shooting pig by moonlight, however, certainly did appeal ; for one thing there was a distinct flavour of danger about it—a wild boar can be a very tough customer. I promised the Malays to try and get some ball or buckshot cartridges in Singapore, and asked them to meet us when the *Flevo* returned.

The first of the large white pigeons came in from the sea and we hid among the trees. It was nice shooting, with a clear field of fire in front, the only snags being the height and the terrific speed at which the birds came over. I thought my companion's mind must have been somewhere else ; for only two birds crashed to the ground with satisfying thumps, and both fell to my gun. He seemed to be in a thoughtful mood as we walked back along the beach, but at last he spoke. " You know, sir," he said, " if we can't get ball or buckshot cartridges in Singapore, I believe S.G. would do."

" Look," I said to him, " I thought you said you had a wife and three kids."

He made no reply. There are moments when silence is golden ; and obviously our Mr d'Silva thought this was one of them.

After dinner, comfortably tired and at peace with all the world, I lay back in my long cane chair on the bridge and smoked. There was no breeze ; the surface of the lagoon was like black

velvet plentifully bespattered by the reflections of stars. A sampan, moving quietly across it, left a trail of phosphorus in its wake, and two more where the oars turned the water over. From an adjacent hut there came the soft, plaintive strains of some primitive stringed instrument.

As I smoked I thought, and my thoughts were pleasant ones. Where in all the world could I have found a more congenial job, or one in which I would have been happier? The immediate future looked rosy. For voyage after voyage I would sail under cloudless blue skies, over a bluer sea, among tropical islands of surpassing beauty. My comfortable ship had a crew of happy, soft-spoken, soft-eyed, mild-mannered Malays, who were at all times cheerful and willing. With my Chinese *chinchew*, I had no worries over cargo, so that when anchored anywhere among the islands I was perfectly free. In fact it was like cruising in my own yacht and being well paid for it.

I had the equivalent of sporting rights which would have cost a small fortune elsewhere—I could shoot and fish wherever I liked, and according to d'Silva there was much good shooting to come. There were glorious days to be had with the snipe when they rested in a swamp on one of the islands in the course of their southerly migration to the rice-fields of Java; and I must remember to consult a gunsmith in Singapore about the best ammunition for wild pig. I had also to get fishing gear; fishing among the reefs should improve my knowledge of



the islands—but, as to that, I would not be contented till my brain carried a complete picture of reefs, channels, images of headlands, and shapes of coasts and islands, all over the two groups.

There *was* one thing to worry over, though not unduly, because I knew Trowel had warned the *towkays* about the probability of it: I was already some days behind Chester's schedule. I discussed this with d'Silva, who, in spite of my little leg-pull on the beach, I knew was devoted to his family. He was afraid his wife would be worrying, but was optimistic about the rest of the voyage. We had two more passages to make before we reached Singapore. The first one, of about 100 miles, would take us to our final island in the South Natunas, over towards the coast of Borneo; the next, of roughly 250 miles to the westward, should take us to the Horsburgh. Both were over stretches of open sea, and most important for my peace of mind, as soon as we got well clear of Great Natuna I would be off the obsolete Dutch chart and on to a British Admiralty one.

Next morning, soon after dawn, with the *Flevo* loaded right down to her marks with copra and some bags of sago, so that we could not have got another pound of cargo into her with a shoe-horn, we hove up and proceeded. We easily picked up the buoys some time before we reached them, and what surprised me, we actually saw their moorings as well. Not one of them had been laid in less than two and a half fathoms of water, yet every

rusty old fire-bar was clearly visible lying on the bottom as we passed it. I have often wondered about that wonderful transparency of the sea around those islands, but never got a scientific explanation of it. Possibly it may be due to their being so remote from civilisation and so sparsely populated; or the great depths obtained in some places may have something to do with it. Off the east side of Mindanao, in the Philippines, for instance, a depth of over six miles has been obtained. Again why should it vary so much in areas not very far apart? I gave it up; but I certainly found it useful on occasions.

Though it was now so well marked, I had to use caution rounding Chester's Bend, but once I had passed the stout bole I was able to proceed at full speed down the rest of the channel. Soon I shot triumphantly between the planks that marked the entrance, and stood out into the deep blue sea beyond. I was now in clover—making an ocean passage with a chart I could trust.

I sent for the *chinchew* to ask him why we were going to the South Natunas, as obviously we could take no more cargo. He told me we had on board nine of the *towkay's* men from Sedanau, who were to open up a new sago plantation. He suggested that it might save time if we landed them in the ship's boat; and as saving time was my main object in life just then, I readily agreed. After lunch I relieved the gunner on the bridge and told



him I would not require him up there for some time. Then, while leaning on the rail, looking ahead, and thinking of nothing in particular, the extreme transparency, which hitherto I had often blessed, gave me the worst fright I had known since the Belgian cross-Channel steamer so nearly rammed the *John Lockett* in the Straits of Dover half a dozen years before.

Suddenly, without any warning, such as discoloured water, I saw a sunken rock rise up right under the *Flevo's* bows. To ring the telegraph to "stop," then "full speed astern," then grab the rail to brace myself against the shock of impact, were simultaneous actions. Bitter, poignant thoughts simply galloped through my brain during the next half-minute while I waited for the ship to strike. I thought of my broken promise to the old *towkay*; of my professional disgrace in having lost the ship entrusted to my care; of my dreams of a rosy future, now shattered; of the unholy joy of Chester and his disreputable friends. The gunner appeared on the bridge and used a common Malay expression, "*tid' apa*"—it doesn't matter!

D'Silva ran up the ladder, half-dressed; he had been sleeping. He blamed himself bitterly for not having warned me. The same thing happened every time they passed that way, and they had never got a sounding of less than eight fathoms. Chester knew that patch so well that he had a name for it; he called it "the Aquarium." I

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stopped the engines, and the surface of the sea, which had been disturbed by the wash from the propeller, became smooth and glassy again.

With d'Silva I looked over the side. Everywhere as far as we could see there were rocks, red and pink coral, and waving weeds amongst which fishes of many brilliant hues were swimming. It *was* like looking down through the pellucid depths at a vast aquarium, and was really a fascinating sight could I have enjoyed it; but I was still trembling with anxiety. The engines were put ahead again, but it was a very worried shipmaster indeed who saw everywhere huge rocks, above which his vessel was harmlessly steaming.

My island loomed up ahead and quickly grew. I could see no sign of a *tongkang*, so it would be necessary to use my boat. As I stood in on the lead a number of men appeared on the beach, shouted to us, and indicated the best landing place. The boat was already swung out, and as soon as the anchor was dropped on the bottom, our passengers were hustled into it. The gunner and his men needed no urging; there was a real "homeward bound" feeling among them. The boat fairly raced for the beach, landed the passengers, raced back, and was hoisted. Up came the anchor; I swung the *Flevo* round, and soon we were heading to the westward at full speed; first stop Singapore, I hoped!

I called d'Silva. "Drive her for all you're worth,



and I'll have her anchored off Johnston's Pier before dark to-morrow," I told him.

## X.

At her best the *Flevo* rarely exceeded ten knots, but there was a steady beat about her engines and a cheerful rustle rising from her bow-wave as she drove homeward through the night. From the stokehold there came occasional shouts from the firemen and an imperious rattling of shovels on the floor-plates as they demanded more coal from the trimmers in the bunkers. With the dawn I got cross-bearings of two of the distant South Anambas Islands and was able to assure d'Silva that, if all went well, he was likely to spend the night in the bosom of his family.

The weather was clear but for a slight heat haze, and I was just thinking of taking a first optimistic look for Tanjong Brakit, on Bintang Island, a headland lying about twelve miles south-east of the Horsburgh, when a small black cloud appeared on the horizon ahead. It was a little disquietening; but I consoled myself with the thought that most heavy rain-squalls in the Malacca and Singapore Straits, though dense, are short-lived, and that this one should have blown over long before we reached the Horsburgh. But the black patch did not grow; it spread over the sky, and I soon

discovered that it did not consist of rain but smoke ; it was as if I had suddenly passed from the clear sky of the tropics into the London River at one of its busiest moments.

Soon masts and smoking funnels were showing up ; a great armada had just debouched from the Singapore Straits and had entered the South China Sea. It was too vast to be anything local ; and the truth dawned on me like a flash—here at last was the tardy Russian Baltic fleet ! My first impulse was to take avoiding action ; to sheer stealthily away to the southward and try to hide near one of the small islands till they passed. But a minute's reflection told me that this would rouse the suspicion of a particularly nervous and suspicious fleet and assuredly I would not get very far. There would be vessels in that fleet that could do two knots to my one ; and it would be better to stand on steadily and look as ordinary and harmless as indeed I was.

At that moment I would have welcomed the heaviest rain-squall that ever blew over the Straits, but the sky remained obstinately clear ; indeed even the heat haze had gone. Presently a small object detached itself from the great maze of hulls, masts, and funnels and came tearing at a high rate of speed straight for the *Flevo*. In those days we seamen used to talk of a vessel having a great bone in her mouth when we meant a conspicuous, high bow-wave ; and this one was carrying about the biggest bone I had ever seen. It was no Dutch-



man this time, but a destroyer flying the Russian flag!

She was fine on my port bow, so fine that I sincerely hoped she had a careful man at her wheel. I felt like edging away a bit, but again feared that I might arouse suspicion. She thundered past about an easy biscuit-toss away, and soon we were labouring in her wash. Two bearded officers wearing leather sea-boots—presumably from force of habit—studied us through telescopes. It was the second time during the voyage that I had been thoroughly scrutinised; but by the time the first scrutiny had reached this stage I had become aware that it was friendly. This one, I felt, was not; it was distinctly hostile and sinister.

The destroyer passed under the *Flevo's* stern, turned, and made off to the westward to rejoin the fleet. As she came abeam on the starboard side I ordered the gunner to dip our ensign to her; but she was not so polite as the Dutchman had been; she ignored the salute and made off, having, I hoped, found no reason for suspicion.

In the meantime the great fleet was coming on at a very leisurely pace. It passed along my starboard beam, and since it was on a parallel, if opposite, course, I had a good chance to study it. I may say at once that never have I seen such an obsolete collection of rusty ineffectiveness. Battleships, cruisers, coast defence ships, destroyers, torpedo-boats, they straggled past in no sort of formation. Bringing up the rear were some three-masted square-

rigged steamers—going to war with royal yards across as Nelson's ships had gone into action at Trafalgar! It was charitable to assume that they were store ships. Onward they crawled, on their dilatory way to meet one of the world's most modern and efficient navies.

Their decks were crowded with men who seemed to be sullen and sluggish when I mentally compared them with our own lively naval ratings. Perhaps they, also, were wearing leather sea-boots. I could not help thinking of them as lambs being carried to the slaughter—and how right I was! Later in Singapore, when I reported this encounter to the Master Attendant, he said, "God help them when they meet the Japs. Really, you know, they're more to be pitied than laughed at!"

History has dealt faithfully with the subsequent proceedings of those ships. Some little time after I saw them they were joined by another squadron, under another admiral, who had left the Baltic after them and came out by the Cape; and the combined fleets made for Vladivostok. Admiral Togo seemed to have played with them, and by the time he had finished playing, the fleets had been destroyed. Of the men who had crowded the decks, 4000 had been killed and 7300 taken prisoner, including both admirals. In spite of our contempt for their unseamanlike qualities, few of us could grudge a measure of sympathy. The Japanese lost three torpedo-boats.



Hardly had the smoke of the armada disappeared over the north-eastern horizon than I sighted the Horsburgh; and an hour later we passed the lighthouse with only thirty-two miles to go. We met two steamers coming down the Straits, and they seemed to be interested in us, for both altered course to have a closer look: I concluded that the news about us being overdue had spread about the port. The tall buildings of Singapore and the masts and funnels of the anchored shipping came into view.

I had no idea of cutting a dash, but I was determined to take up as good a berth as Chester would have done—close in for the benefit of the lighters which would be taking away our cargo. When I shouted to the gunner to let the anchor go I could have sworn the *Flevo* was in the exact spot from whence I had taken her away—and I did not care what beachcomber was watching her. I did not know then, of course, that Chester had left Singapore for good.

A number of sampans which had been waiting came alongside as soon as the anchor dropped, and from one of them the young *towkay*, Teo Tao Peng, shot like an arrow, and came bounding up the bridge ladder, two steps at a time. He wrung my hand till I thought he would wring it off. I thought he was going to embrace me, and was glad he didn't, for I don't like being embraced—by men, anyhow. I was four days late, but safe, which

was what really mattered—another violent handshake. He could see the *Flevo* was loaded down to her marks. Had I actually got into Sedanau and out again without mishap? I had; no bother, at least not much. This brought the most violent handshake of all.

We had arrived in time to save his father's life. For days after the *Flevo* left he had wandered round the office like a lost soul. When we did not get back on the tenth day as usual, he had taken to his bed and refused all comfort. On the thirteenth day, in spite of the assurances of Mr Trowel, who had very kindly called, he had even refused his food. That very morning a misguided member of his office staff had told him that in the small hours of the night the Russian Baltic fleet had been seen passing through Singapore Straits; and that almost finished him. If his precious *Flevo* was still afloat, those monsters from the Baltic would soon destroy her!

The most competent doctor in the city was called in, but had to admit that he was baffled; and it was left to the humblest member of the staff to achieve an immediate and completely satisfactory cure. Breathlessly, the office boy burst into the sick-room and announced that the *Flevo's* house-flag had just been hoisted on the signal flagstaff down by the harbour office!

"Is he all right now?" I asked.

"All right *now*!" Tao Peng cried. "He wanted



to come off with me. It isn't easy to put your foot down on your male parent, but I managed to stop him. But he'll be aboard to-morrow morning. Oh! you'll be a 'joss man' with him from now on!"

And I was.

## THE ESCAPE OF THE *RODDAM*.

### I.

AWAY back in 1902, Castries, the port of St Lucia, one of the Windward Islands, was a dismal little town, hot and dusty. But it had one of the finest harbours in the West Indies. A busy coaling station, steamers from all over the South Atlantic put in there to coal, and thousands of tons of shipping always lay at its begrimed wharves. The town lies in a cup, hugging the water and the giant hills, while the long harbour cuts deep into the island, which is mountainous and covered with luxuriant tropical vegetation. To the westward the water shimmers out into the blue Caribbean.

Between the walls of the vast out-jutting cliffs that close gradually in upon the harbour as it extends inland, it was particularly hot on the afternoon of the 8th May 1902. A carking lassitude hung over the port like a pall, and its white population seemed to stagnate in an air of dejection. After tea the Port Officer came out of his house, with its oppressive atmosphere, and got into his boat. Nearly two hours earlier it had been reported that a strange vessel was approaching from the



northward, and the latest report was that she was still approaching. She was certainly taking her time about it, and that gave him a good excuse for taking a turn seaward out of the sultry atmosphere of the port. Soon after he pushed off he sighted the strange vessel—a steamer apparently painted grey from truck to waterline. Only a wisp of smoke came from her funnel, and her bow-wave was little more than a ripple. He thought it strange that she should have slowed down so far out, for she could have come on a mile or two before taking a pilot. He concluded that her captain did not know the port or, if he did, that he was a very timid navigator without a chart. The former was likely to be the case, for he could not recollect having seen the vessel before.

With his boatmen pulling long, steady strokes and his coxswain steering straight for the stranger he picked up his powerful binoculars and trained them on her. There were several things about her that were unusual. With a seaman's trained eye, the first thing he noticed was that the steamer had apparently lost an anchor; anyhow her star-board hawse-pipe was empty. Her accommodation ladder was down, which is not seamanlike practice; for a pilot ladder is safer until a vessel is actually in harbour or at anchor. Getting closer, he tried to read the name on the bow, but failed; then he made the discovery that instead of being painted grey the vessel was thickly coated with fine grey dust. There were other things to offend a sea-

man's eye : aloft, her rigging hung in Irish pennants, ratlines were missing, and there were many loose and frayed rope's-ends. Altogether very untidy !

By that time the ghostly, dishevelled steamer was hardly moving. He could see no sign of life about her deck, but the remaining anchor splashed into the sea, and he heard some fathoms of chain cable running lazily out through the hawse-pipe. It ceased running and slowly tightened ; it was as if she had anchored herself. He got close enough to hail the bridge, but there was no answer ; and he ordered the coxswain to put the boat alongside the accommodation ladder. Again he hailed the bridge, without result, so he decided to go on board. By that time he and his men had become somewhat unnerved by the silent mystery of it all, but he forced himself to climb the ladder, which was ankle deep in dust. It led up to the lower bridge which he gained ; and here at last was someone with whom he could talk. It was a man sitting in a deck-chair. But he could not talk ; he was dead. Figures lay about the fore-deck, half-buried in grey ashes.

The coxswain came up out of the boat and, with him to lend some moral courage, the Port Officer determined to investigate the grim tragedy. The door to what looked like the saloon was open, but, fearing what he might find in there, he decided to try the chart-room. If there was an officer alive, that was where he would probably be. He climbed another ladder to the deserted bridge and



found another corpse lying on a pile of smoking ashes. Both chart-room doors were open and he stepped inside. A figure was half-reclining on the settee at the after-end of the room. It was a man with features distorted by pain; his clothing was singed and blackened; his face was so badly burnt as to be unrecognisable. A towel hung down loosely from his neck, and printed on the towel was a word of which the Port Officer could only read half; but at the same time it struck him that the lay-out of the chart-room was familiar. "Am I on board the *Roddam*?" he asked incredulously.

"You are," the man on the settee groaned.

"Good gracious! where is my friend Captain Freeman?"

"I am Captain Freeman!" the man on the settee said—and fainted.

## II.

The *Roddam* began that fateful day of the 8th May 1902 where she finished it—at the port of Castries, in St Lucia—and the story deals with what happened between her departure from there and her return less than eighteen hours after. She was a steamer of 2378 tons gross, 1506 tons net, and is described as a well-deck ship 289.6 feet long. She had a poop aft which measured 29 feet, and a lower bridge amidships 114 feet long. Built

of steel in 1887, she was owned by Steel, Young & Co., London; and she left that port on the 11th March 1902 under the command of Captain E. W. Freeman, for Trinidad and other West Indian ports. At Trinidad she discharged a lot of cargo; then she worked her way northwards, and at Grenada took on board twenty coloured stevedores and a European supercargo, so that her hands numbered forty-five all told. She arrived at Port Castries on the 6th May, and by 11 P.M. on the 7th had finished all cargo work and was ready to leave for Martinique, the next island of call.

While discharging at Castries, Captain Freeman tried to get into cable communication with Martinique, but failed. Mont Pelée, a volcano which had last erupted in 1851, had begun to throw up ashes, and on the 5th of the month a stream of boiling mud rushed down from near the summit and reached the sea in three minutes. A sugar plantation in the way was wiped out; and on the west coast the sea receded some three hundred feet, breaking the submarine telegraph cables. At Castries there was considerable nervousness about what was happening at Martinique, so in the absence of information either by steamer or cable Captain Freeman decided to go and investigate. A few minutes after midnight he unmoored and steamed out of harbour. The weather was sultry but fine, and the sea smooth.

Two hours later the captain was called by the second officer, who reported that a black squall



was making up ahead and he did not like the look of the sky. The captain went on the bridge. Half the sky, that from the zenith aft, was brilliant with stars; the other half was covered by a dark-grey cloud-mantle, with, half-way up it, a bank as black as ink through which jagged sheets of lightning flickered. He could hear the distant rumbling of thunder; obviously they were running into an intense electrical disturbance. If the month had been October instead of May he would instantly have suspected an approaching hurricane. The engines were rung to slow and the *Roddam's* speed decreased until she was doing only about three knots.

Soon the cloud-mantle covered the sky and a fine rain descended from it. The inky-black bank moved right over the remaining stars; heavier rain fell and the sky was rent by a blinding flash. A terrific peal of thunder followed; the blackness above seemed to open, and out of it there came an almost solid sheet of water. In the abysmal darkness all that could be seen forward was the small diffused patch of illumination showing from the mast-head light, and the silvery rods of rain that beat on it. That rain-distorted halo and the bearded face of the helmsman peering into the lighted binnacle were the only objects visible anywhere. Even the funnel, only thirty feet abaft the bridge, was blotted out from view. The bridge seemed to be immersed in a veritable river of rain, so that in the swirling confusion it was at times almost impossible for the man on it to tell whether

they were on board the ship or in the sea. Another vivid flash gave them a momentary glimpse of each other ; another peal of thunder almost deafened them.

With the engines working at dead slow and the steam whistle blaring out its melancholy prolonged blast every two minutes, the *Roddam* crawled to the northward. Men's ears were strained with intense listening, for sight was denied. Everything, including the air and the rain, seemed to be charged with electricity ; the ship herself fairly bristled with it. Another blinding flash and a truly ear-splitting peal came simultaneously and for a brief moment it seemed like the end of everything. On the bridge they were half-stunned, as if they had been hit by a giant's club, and the ship shuddered from stem to stern. They were sure she had struck something, or had been struck, but neither eyes nor ears could detect any strange object through the almost impenetrable veil of liquidity. The engines were stopped, then put on to slow again, the captain having decided that the lightning had only scored a near miss. Soon after that the cloud-mantle cleared away, rolled up like a mammoth chart, and the stars glittered again. The engines were put on to full speed, and a little later there came the false dawn.

With the growing daylight the sky became cloudless and blue as if it had been scrubbed and washed. The high land round Bourgos Point was sighted almost ahead : in the pale and fragile Caribbean



dawn it loomed up like an unsubstantial morning cloud, becoming rugged and more verdurous as the light grew. By the time it was full daylight the coast of Martinique lay all along the starboard beam in tropical glory. Ridge after ridge, green with vegetation, spread down to the sea; and between the headlands of the coast there were small bays with beaches of dazzling white sand. The southern slope of Mont Pelée, which rises to a height of 4450 feet at the northern end of the island, and the volcanic gullies that radiate down to the sea from it, were still mellowed to a purple bloom by distance. The *Roddam* stood on and opened out the harbour of St Pierre, the chief commercial centre of the island.

On that bright, still morning the scene was magnificent. The town was bathed in sunshine; houses of stone, with red roofs, rose in terraces from the blue water of the bay up to the dense green that fringed the foot of the mountain. The towers of the cathedral glistened in the sun. Beyond the smoking volcano, which loomed high above the harbour, the sky was dark. Packed along the shore were small inter-island steamers, schooners which had brought sugar from the various plantations, fishing-boats, and other small sailing craft. Less than two cables length outside them was the fine passenger liner *Roraima* of the Quebec Line; and a little way to seaward of her the smart white-painted *Grappler*, the cable company's repairing steamer, was steaming along trying to fish up

the broken cable. On board her alone was there any sign of activity. The deep hush that brooded over town and harbour was broken only by the chiming of church bells for early mass, for it was Ascension Day.

The *Roddam* glided into the calm harbour and anchored with the thirty-fathom shackle in the water, two and a half cables distant from the *Roraima*. There was a slight current setting off-shore and both vessels lay heading it. In that peaceful scene of tropical beauty the *Roddam* did not appear in the least incongruous; for she was a handsome vessel and brightly painted, with gleaming black hull, white superstructure, white-painted boats. Indeed the reflection of her red, white and black funnel seemed to add to the glamour of the harbour. From her main truck flew the house-flag of her owners—white with red lettering.

After she had been brought up to her anchor Captain Freeman lingered on the bridge picking up the landmarks of the town with his binoculars. He could see with his mind's eye much that the glasses could not reveal, for he knew St Pierre well. There were the narrow streets thronged with worshippers; the market-place with stalls laden with sugar-cane, tropical fruit, and sweet-scented flowers; flies buzzing round the fish and meat stalls; little green lizards running about on the sun-baked walls. Everywhere there would be bullocks, mules, fowls, cats, and dogs. As he



*RODDAM* IN HARBOUR—ST PIERRE





watched, a mail coach moved out along one of the fine lower roads. He could see the jail, but could not possibly be aware that inside it a negro prisoner was fretting over his incarceration on such a glorious day, a negro prisoner destined to achieve a small niche in history.

The ship's agent came off in his boat and with Captain Freeman discussed the prospect of discharging the cargo he had brought. The agent admitted that there had been a good deal of nervousness about Mont Pelée, but since it had erupted on the 5th of the month, when the cable had been broken, something else had happened. The Souffrière, a volcano at the north end of the island of St Vincent, about ninety miles to the south, had been in eruption, and caused a lot of damage. Bad news, of course, but not for the inhabitants of Martinique, who were that day giving thanks for it; for it was generally believed that the Souffrière acted as a sort of safety-valve for Mont Pelée, and therefore the danger was over for the time being.

What was likely to cause delay, the agent said, was the lack of lighters into which to discharge the cargo. He doubted if any would come off on Ascension Day. Captain Freeman did not wish to waste a day, and proposed going on to Guadeloupe, but the agent said he would go on shore and see what could be done with some of the stevedores and lightermen who had already been to mass. White dust began to fall silently, like snow, lying thick on decks and clothing. The agent went

down the accommodation ladder and got into his boat; and one minute later—at 7.45—Mont Pelée blew up.

### III.

Mont Pelée blew up! The detonation shook sky and earth and sea: it was heard 250 miles away. It caused momentary consternation as far north as Gaudeloupe and as far south as Tobago. Columns of flame and great black pillars of smoke were belched high into the sky. A hellish blast was expelled from the mountain through a crater which seemed to have opened horizontally, so that the gases and the glowing stones and dust were concentrated on the comparatively small tract of country that lay in its line of progression. Moving at the terrific rate of over 100 miles an hour, that blast struck the harbour, raising huge waves which destroyed the smaller craft lying in-shore, and killing their crews with fire, gas, and hot dust. Its roaring filled the air, and the blackness that immediately followed shut out all light. The darkness was that of soot; the daylight was made darker than the darkest night.

It killed every living thing, even the insects in the air; no, not *everything*—it spared the negro prisoner in the dungeon of the jail. That negro was the sole survivor of a town of 40,000 inhabitants—men, women, and children. Those who escaped



being burned to death by the first onslaught of the swiftly moving wall of fire, were buried and suffocated in the molten lava or the ashes that followed the flames ; or asphyxiated by the dense gases.

A minute and a half elapsed from the moment Mont Pelée blew up till the blast reached the harbour, and during those breathless ninety seconds Captain Freeman saw the most terrible sight that any man ever saw, and lived to tell about. A few hours later he was the only man left alive who *had* seen it. After warning the agent to come out of his boat, he looked up and saw the flames and black clouds belching out of the crater. He saw a mass of fire, like a flaming whirlwind, reach the harbour. He saw the black destroying stream, glowing with live cinders, that followed, rushing like a tornado down the lower hills and spreading out like a fan ; and the town disappearing under it—tree after tree, house after house, terrace after terrace, at such express speed that it could be said the destruction was almost instantaneous.

A few seconds after the fierce, flaming blast had blotted out the small craft lying along the shore, it reached the *Roddam*, swept the supercargo and some sailors overboard and drowned them in the sea, which was already boiling. The agent never reached safety ; he was caught on the accommodation ladder and killed ; his boatmen were drowned to a man. As Captain Freeman, already badly burned by the superheated dust, and with clothing on fire, staggered toward the chart-room, he saw

a great black pall, hundreds of feet high, moving toward him over the face of the water which already resembled a series of great precipices. Then he got what was perhaps the most poignant shock of the many that ghastly, confused morning had produced : he saw the white, graceful *Grappler* heel right over and sink like a stone. Great flames shot up from the *Roraima* ; then the inky pall closed over the *Roddam* and her horrified captain.

Huge fires broke out all over the town and along the line of the water-front ; their crackling flames were just visible, but they gave no light. From the direction of the beach there came piercing, heart-rending shrieks : they quickly died away, though the crackling continued. The burning dust, swirling over the ship, set fire to boats and other woodwork. The captain managed to get into the chart-room and close the door behind him. In what could only be a temporary refuge he tried to think, but for a time all that would come to his mind was the fate of the *Grappler*. He had one or two friends in her. In the darkness of that small room he could see her just before she took the final plunge, with men scrambling over the rail to get on to the side which was already horizontal.

His own ship was rolling heavily, and once he thought she was going over altogether. He found himself caring little ; better to be drowned than burnt to death, or even endure his present agony. Dust penetrated the chart-room, seering his eyes, face and hands, and filling his nose, mouth, and



lungs till he choked. He could stand no more of it ; hardly knowing what he was doing he opened the chart-room door and found the air outside just breathable. It was then he determined to attempt the apparently unachievable, to get his vessel away from that inferno.

It was still pitch dark, but he staggered across the bridge, stumbling over a dead body as he went. His intention was to find someone alive ; if possible to muster a few survivors, if such existed. He had reached the top of the bridge ladder on the star-board side when he felt someone tugging at his trouser leg. He bent down and heard a human voice—a welcome, friendly Cockney voice. It came from one of the firemen, standing on the ladder, and told him that the second and third engineers were safe in the engine-room with some firemen and trimmers. He asked the fireman if there was still steam on the boilers ; there might well be, for, though so much had happened, it could not be much more than half an hour since he had anchored ; and in the uncertainty of his further movements he had never rung off the engines. The fireman volunteered to go below and find out ; so Captain Freeman told him to ask the second engineer to let him know by ringing “ stand by ” on the engine-room telegraph.

If, happily, there was steam, and the engines could be moved, the next problem, and a very formidable one, was to get rid of the anchor. They could not heave it up, and to unshackle a red-hot

cable was impossible. He remembered that when the *Roddam* was in dry-dock going through a survey the cables had been paid out and lowered to the bottom of the dock so that the chain-locker was empty. He had gone down with a surveyor and noticed that the ends of the cables were seized to the keelson down in the chain locker with wire seizings—not quite *his* idea of seamanlike practice, but the surveyor had made no comment.

It was the starboard anchor that was down. If he could let the cable run out to the bare end then get enough way on the ship to burst the seizing, he might get clear. That seemed the only hope. He descended to the lower bridge and, guided by groans, found the chief engineer in a deck-chair beside the top of the accommodation ladder. To a request that he would make his way forward and open the windlass, the chief engineer replied that he was so badly burned he could not move, and indeed he died in agony three hours later.

Expecting a message from the engine-room the captain returned to the bridge and groped his way to the telegraph. The pointer was still at stop. But there *might* be steam very shortly, so he got his megaphone and, without much hope, hailed the fore-deck. To his surprise and satisfaction he was answered; by whom he did not know, but he ordered the unknown to twist the handle of the brake, open the windlass, and let the cable run. He could hardly see his hand in front of his face; but, listening intently, he heard,



after a few minutes, links of chain cable running out through the hawse-pipe.

It was hardly the thing to give the engineers an order by the telegraph before they had reported being ready; but perhaps, down there, they did not realise the urgency. He could not put his burnt hands on the telegraph handle; he hooked his arms round it and jerked it down to "full speed astern." A couple of despairing, silent minutes followed. Was there steam? Was there anyone down there to ring an answer? Had the fireman managed to return to the engine-room, for it was dangerous to move about anywhere? An unexpected, strident clang from the telegraph he was leaning against startled him, and bending down he could just see that the answering pointer had come to rest at "full speed astern."

Down below the engines were throbbing; at one time, not so long ago, he had not dared to hope they would ever throb again. The throbbing brought vibration and the rails round the bridge were shaking violently, for the vessel was so light as to be almost in ballast trim. She must have been simply racing astern, though her captain, blindfolded by the sooty gloom, had no means of knowing. A moment later he *did* know; for the heavy chain cable was roaring up through the spurling-pipe from the chain locker, leaping over the windlass and rattling out through the hawse-pipe. An almost deafening, satisfactory roar.

There came a sudden and violent jerk, as if

the ship had been brought back on her haunches, and the rattling and leaping ceased. Now, what had happened? He thought he heard the clink of the end link against the windlass, but could not be sure. He seemed to sense that the *Roddam* was still moving backward through the water, but could not be sure of that either; for he could not see the water. In fact he could see nothing but the dim line of flares along the beach, and they were too confused for him to detect any alteration in their bearing.

He felt there was someone near him and found he was being touched. He was no longer alone; he had acquired an ally. It was the boatswain—as stout-hearted a seaman as ever walked aboard a ship. He had made his way up from a room in which he had taken shelter at the forward end of the port alleyway, to report that, as he thought, the cable had parted. Anyhow, the *Roddam* was clear of the ground to her captain's inexpressible relief. It was, of course, the wire seizing that had parted; if the end of that cable had been shackled to the keelson, or to an angle-iron on the collision bulk-head, in the modern fashion, the *Roddam* might have remained at St Pierre—a burnt-out hulk.

Captain Freeman, with the boatswain at the wheel, kept the engines moving astern so long as they were taking her clear; but a single-screw ship going astern usually throws her head to star-



board, and the *Roddam* did so. She came round till she was parallel to the beach, its general outline still marked by tongues of flame that shot upward, but gave no light. To have kept the engines going astern any longer would have meant canting her stern toward the beach and closing it; besides she was in a good position for getting clear. The captain rang the telegraph to stop and ordered the boatswain to put the helm hard-a-port—as the helm order was in those days. Now for the open sea, he thought; and with his right elbow he forced the telegraph handle down to “full speed ahead.”

But it was not going to be as easy as that; difficulties and disappointments still lay ahead. The boatswain could not move the wheel; the steering-gear was jammed with dust and wreckage. When they began to go ahead the *Roddam's* head swung toward the beach, and the engines had to be put astern again to draw her back and straighten her up. And the engines had to be kept going, otherwise she might drift anywhere and probably lose the guidance of the flares: he did not dare to drop the other anchor. The boatswain had collected five men; one of them was put on to throwing burning things overboard, the others tried to clear the steering-gear. Stumbling about in the darkness, burned, blistered and in continual pain, exhorted by the boatswain, they worked on.

## IV.

Alone again on the bridge, all the captain could do was to make short tacks ahead and astern with the flaming, roaring beach less than 1000 feet off the port beam. During the second dash ahead he suddenly became aware of flaming and roaring in a fresh direction. The burning *Roraima* was almost under the bows, and the engines had to be reversed promptly to clear her. She had been unable to get rid of her anchor. By that time the *Roddam* herself was in almost as bad a condition; with the burning dust thick on the decks, and tarpaulins, boats, rigging, and derricks blazing. From all over the ship there came the groans and cries of unseen sufferers. They were dying of suffocation; every breath was an agony. One or two jumped overboard, only to die quickly, for the sea was still boiling.

Backwards and forwards across the dark harbour went that floating furnace with her indomitable, watchful captain working the telegraph handle with his arms, and the equally indomitable boatswain striving to clear the steering-gear. Once the captain was not quite watchful enough. Owing to an almost paralysing paroxysm of coughing he allowed his ship to get too close to the flaming *Roraima*, and only just drew clear of her in time. He was so close that he could hear the frantic shrieks of anguish and despairing appeals for help; giving



him probably the worst moment of his life. He had to steel himself against his instincts; wrench himself away from a life-long tradition that a British sailor never refuses to answer a call for help. But even if his steering-gear had been in order he could not possibly have gone alongside that blazing ship with the sea then running. To have done so would have hastened the end of both.

The *Roddam* drew clear and with distance the calls for help faded. They did not last much longer; for the *Roraima* mercifully put those tortured souls out of their misery. Hardly had the *Roddam* got clear of her than she blew up and killed everyone on board. Of those who had been aboard the ships in the harbour—large and small—when the *Roddam* anchored that bright morning, not one was left alive. The town did have *one* survivor, humble though he was; the harbour none!

Captain Freeman was himself in agony. He had almost despaired of getting his ship away from that death-trap, and was wondering how much longer he could stick on his feet, when he heard a cheery shout from the boatswain—the first cheerful sound he had heard since Mont Pelée blew up; and that seemed to have happened half a lifetime before, though in reality it could not have been more than three hours at the outside. The steering-gear was clear; the boatswain had tried the wheel hard-over both ways, and it worked. Telling him to put it hard-a-port, he rang for full speed ahead. The *Roddam* answered her helm; her head

swung ninety degrees and was steadied. The flaming beach lay dead astern; the Caribbean Sea ahead. This time, surely . . .

As she gathered way the flames astern grew dim with distance, and it became necessary to steer by compass. The captain produced a box of matches from the chart-room; and the boatswain took the two lamps out of the binnacle, lit them, and put them back. A glance at the compass card showed the ship heading to the eastward, heading straight back to St Pierre! There was something wrong; she could not possibly have turned right round in a few minutes. The steering compass was out of order and useless; every compass in the ship was out of order; she might be heading in any direction in the pitch darkness.

It was a strange, explosive fog sound-signal that came to the rescue. Near the beach a large rum distillery was blazing. Perhaps naturally it was the boatswain to whom the idea came, for he had not been subjected to the same intense and prolonged mental strain as had the captain; and, besides, the idea had been forced on his notice in a somewhat curious way. While sheltering in the alley-way he had found himself beside one of the coloured stevedores when he heard the first of a prolonged series of explosions. They sounded like gun-fire and the boatswain was puzzled; but with every subsequent explosion the stevedore emitted a deep groan as if under the influence of a great personal loss. It was certainly a great loss, though not



directly to him; for as he explained to the boatswain, every fresh explosion meant another barrel of rum burst—and he knew of a much better use for rum. The boatswain agreed with him, then; he didn't now; for by bringing the sound of those explosions dead astern, and keeping them there, the *Roddam* was able to make still further progress toward the Caribbean.

For the next quarter of an hour they strained their ears with the detonations becoming fainter, and Captain Freeman wondering what he would do when he lost them altogether. True he had now an offing of three or four miles, so the immediate danger was not so great; but all over the ship men were dying, and even the few without serious injuries were crazy with the desire to get farther and farther away from the horror of St Pierre. The shower of dust became a little lighter and he found he could see a little way through it. He could see the water, but there was not a ripple on it; there was no wind, nothing that could possibly serve as a guide. Then, well up in the sky, where it was a little clearer, he saw a dead white disc; it was the sun showing as it often shows through fog. He brought it abeam and headed to the south-west—a course that would take him nearer to St Lucia, to which island he had decided to return, and still farther away from Martinique.

He could now relax a little—but not for long, for his ship was still far from safe. She was burning in several places round the decks, and the

woodwork in the cabins was on fire. She was in a condition which, if she had been going along peacefully on an ordinary voyage, would have brought anxious men all over the ship rushing to their fire stations; but the men of the *Roddam* had got beyond anxiety; it was now just a case of slog on. The boatswain hardly knew where to start; but he organised a gang consisting of the few sailors who were not completely disabled, one or two firemen who were off duty, and some of the coloured stevedores, and got on with it.

The first thing he had to do was to see to the casualties. To begin with, only five dead bodies were found, but fifteen wounded men, burned, twisted and contorted, were brought on deck. The worst case with which the devoted band of rescuers had to deal was that of a man who had jumped down a hold in his agony, and lay where he fell, with both arms and a leg broken. In the next few hours of that ghastly passage eight men died.

Throughout most of it the captain himself steered; at first with his elbows, then with his hand wrapped in wet towels, for almost everything was red-hot to the touch. There were others about who could steer, but their injuries were as bad as his; and every spare man was needed to get the fire under control. A coil of new canvas hose was brought up, but before it could be laid on the deck the burning dust had to be shovelled away from its path, otherwise it would have been burnt too. Once



the hose had been connected and the donkeyman had set the pump going that danger was over, as also the danger from burning clothing. The systematic extinguishing of the fire went on.

Occasionally Captain Freeman stole a brief minute from the wheel to see how the work went on, and to encourage and praise. He noted with satisfaction that the white men were taking the lead and bearing the brunt of the work, though there were heroes among the stevedores too. And a wave of gratitude came over him to that gang of scorched scallywags, whose innate fidelity to their ship was triumphing over physical torture and fatigue. Their clothing had been torn to singed rags; hair, beards, eyebrows, even eyelashes had been burnt off. As well as fighting the fire, they were fighting pain and a deadly fatigue. The sun now blazed down pitilessly, and its rays seemed to be magnified, rather than lessened, by the dust from Mont Pelée through which they were passing. How men thought, with intense longing, of that downpour that had almost swamped their vessel less than twelve hours before! Less than twelve hours! and even as they worked, men who had been in full vigour then lay dying!

At last the boatswain was able to report that the fires in the cabins had been extinguished, though they were burning round the decks and occasionally a fresh one would break out. Every piece of canvas, such as awnings, boat covers, and hatch tarpaulins, had been burnt; woodwork—

boats, awning spars, and derricks—was badly charred or completely destroyed. They were content to deal only with active flames; they had neither the time nor the strength to clear up the decks where in places the volcanic dust lay to a depth of two or three feet. Indeed, when they tried to remove the blackened corpse that lay on the bridge, they found that the disturbed dust flared up again, especially if fanned by even the lightest breeze; and the dust clouds that rose burned and blistered everything they touched.

In maintaining a steady speed to keep the vessel moving to the south-westward the men down below in the engine-room and stokehold had also suffered. Since the engine-room skylight and such openings had been closed, the dust below was nothing like as thick as it was on deck, but a certain amount of it had got down to burn men's lungs and choke them; and in the tropics a stokehold is sufficiently uncomfortable at any time. Still men greased and oiled bearings, and shovelled and trimmed coal, and fed the furnaces, so that a somewhat uncertain five knots could be kept up. As the day wore slowly on the heat increased and the atmosphere became really stifling.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, both in engine-room and stokehold men lolled under ventilators, gasping for any coolness the down-draught of air might bring. It would have been cooler on deck, of course, and those who were not actually working were free to go up if they wanted to. But



they did not want to ; for on the decks there were heaps of superheated dust in which lay corpses no one cared to look at. Down the iron ladder leading to the engine-room came the ubiquitous boatswain with a message for the second engineer. The captain had sighted St Lucia and wanted all the speed the engines could give him. If he could arrive off the port before dark, medical aid and alleviation for the suffering would surely follow. It was like a clarion call to those exhausted men below ; and the boatswain improved matters by informing them that it was no longer necessary to keep skylights and other openings closed, or use gags of damp sweat-rags. The atmosphere was clear again ; the dust had completely disappeared.

Up till a little before three o'clock the captain had still been using as his only guide the white disc of the sun showing uncertainly through the fog of dust ; but now it had cleared completely and he could see a long way. Broad off the port bow St Lucia rose out of the sea in great crags and rolling mountains covered with green forest—a thrice welcome sight ! He could see Pigeon Island with North Cape open just to the westward of it, and judged he would be about nine miles from it. To get an accurate cross-bearing would have meant slewing the binnacle round, and he did not feel equal even to that little bit of extra effort ; besides, his eyes were aching. From Pigeon Island to the entrance of Castries Harbour would be another ten miles. If the engineers could manage to double

the present speed he should be off the port by five o'clock. The change of luck which had begun with the bursting rum barrels was holding, for he had made a wonderful landfall.

Down below they were responding to his appeal. Through the engine-room skylight, now wide open, he could hear the engines running with a faster, firmer beat. Up through the fiddley bars came confident shouts and the loud rattling of a shovel on the iron floor-plates of the stokehold—the recognised signal for more coal from a fireman to his trimmer in the bunker. The flecks of foam created by the breaking bow-wave were merging into a steady stream flowing aft to form a frothing wake. The half-immersed propeller was tossing up spray under the counter.

What a relief it was to be steering by a solid coastline, instead of by that elusive white disc! To be judging progress by sugar plantations that ran down to the sea in deep valleys, as they moved against a background of the high interior with its great rolling forests. How beautiful the island was! Never had the Caribbean looked so blue and sparkling; never had a fouler blot than the *Roddam* moved across it! In the state of his mind and body it was indeed difficult to crystallise his impressions; but there is no doubt that when he opened out the long harbour and sighted Castries glittering white in the distance, he actually experienced a feeling of shame. He had never dreamed that he



would command a ship in such a filthy state, or crawl into an anchorage in such a slovenly way.

He actually found himself wishing that it was dark so that the Port Castries people would not see her; but that diffident mood, product of a mind that for the moment was not thinking too clearly, soon passed, abolished by the groans rising from the fore-deck. He was left with an intense desire to arrive at port while there was still enough daylight for the authorities to see that he was in distress and send off relief for the suffering. Obviously there was now nothing like a full head of steam, so he sent the boatswain below to ask the second engineer for one final effort.

At last he had to hand over the wheel to one of the able seamen, and hang on to the bridge rail close to the telegraph. The boatswain and another seaman went forward to put the windlass in gear for dropping the anchor. The effort for which he had asked proved to be a somewhat feeble one; for the magnificent spurt they had put on had proved too much for the men below and they were almost exhausted. The steam had gone right back; the engines were just turning over. But the effort had not been in vain; the *Roddam* was near enough to Castries to be noticed, and she continued to crawl on till she reached an anchorage. She had then so little way on her that she hardly needed the touch astern the captain gave her before the boatswain twisted the brake of the windlass,

let the anchor go, and brought her up. The *Roddam* with her load of human suffering was at rest.

The running out of the chain cable was a signal to all hands that they, also, could seek rest ; and within a few minutes those who were capable of movement had sought some sort of haven where they could relax, breathe, lick their wounds—and think. The captain, completely exhausted, staggered into the chart-room and relapsed on to his settee—and here, to borrow a current phrase from those who attend continuous performances at the cinema, is where we came in.

#### IV.

It was a few minutes before Captain Freeman came round and was able to talk coherently ; when he did, the Port Officer became the first person in the world to learn that the town and harbour of St Pierre had been completely destroyed ; yes, exterminated. And of those who had actually been on the *Roddam's* deck when Mont Pelée blew up, the captain was the sole survivor.

It took the Port Officer a couple of minutes to realise the magnitude of the disaster and the pitiable condition of those on board the steamer that had so miraculously escaped from it, but from the moment he did he became the busiest man in the West Indies. He assumed complete charge of the steamer ; but before he could arrange



for her to be moved to a permanent place of safety, and more important still in his eyes, to secure medical aid for the sufferers, he had to get ashore. Seldom can a boat of its class have moved more swiftly through the water, with the burly boatmen making the heavy oars bend almost like whale-bone and lifting the bow out of the sea with every one of their powerful combined strokes.

Night had fallen, starry, and full of the laden, soft gloom of the tropics, when the wounded were taken ashore. They were put into hospital at once, but three died the same evening. Altogether, out of forty-six souls, including the agent, who was fatally injured before he could reach safety after coming on board from his boat, twenty-six were killed by blast, fire or gas, or died of injuries. Captain Freeman was three weeks in hospital before he could raise his hands to his face.

To illustrate the condition of the vessel which he and his men had steamed to safety across sixty miles of the Caribbean Sea—it was three days before the dust on deck and in the holds was cool enough for the labourers of Port Castries to handle; and they took 120 tons of it out of the steamer! To call her a floating hell was no exaggeration!

So much for Captain Freeman and his men, and their vessel; what about the island from which they had escaped? So great was the consternation caused, not only in the West Indies but also in France, by the eruption of Mont Pelée that at first it was seriously suggested that the

whole island should be evacuated. This the Government of France would not countenance, and saner counsels prevailed when the panic had subsided. For it was discovered that though the material loss amounted to £4,000,000, besides St Pierre only one-tenth of the island had been devastated. Here is an extract from a letter written by the captain of one of the first British ships to pass that way after the eruption.

“ Two or three days after the news of the disaster at St Pierre in Martinique was received I was ready to leave one of the ports in the Southern States for Trinidad, and I decided I would pass into the Caribbean by the Mona Passage, then go down to the westward of the Windward Islands so as to have a look for myself.

“ As I approached the northern end of Martinique and sighted the cluster of volcanic mountains, I noticed that though Mont Pelée was sending out little puffs of smoke, the country to the north-west of it was as green and beautiful as ever. I knew from previous observation that it was badly broken up by deep, rugged valleys—filled during the rains with raging torrents—but on that bright, sunny morning it looked like rolling downland, with the greenery and drapery of the forest. I had brought abeam the bold, high coastline between La Perle Island and Prêcheur—about six miles from where St Pierre had been—before I noticed any change; then the green vista turned yellow, with great, gaunt, bare trees sticking up through it.



"Then I opened out what looked like a great glacier of ashes which ran down the slope of Mont Pelée and spread out till it covered the eastern shore of the bay. There it was—nearly forty square miles of ashy desolation, the contemplation of which seemed to make my blood run cold. Along the inner edge of the harbour a few masts of wrecked schooners stood up like decayed teeth, but not even a seagull was visible. The silence was absolute; the stillness of death lay over land and sea. When I thought of St Pierre as it was with all its life and gaiety, then of what lay buried under that vast and deep grey inundation, I felt physically sick. I ordered the helm hard over and stood straight out into the Caribbean till I had run the ghastly horror of what had been St Pierre under the horizon."

It is characteristic of British shipmasters to act promptly and in a seamanlike manner in an emergency, no matter how sudden and tremendous; it was the endurance and disregard of physical agony displayed by Captain Freeman throughout the whole of that fatal day that placed him on a higher plane than most of his fellows. Many of his crew also displayed an unselfish devotion beyond all praise, and it has to be remembered that here was no picked crew, but just a collection of sailormen signed on in London after being recruited, haphazard, from the various boarding-houses in and around the Ratcliffe Highway. To praise or reward, justly, would have been impossible. For

instance, the man who in the inky darkness groped his way forward through the choking, superheated, gaseous dust to open the windlass and thus make the escape possible, could neither be praised nor rewarded, for the simple reason that he was never identified. Many other brave deeds were done, unseen and unrecorded, by men who died before the day was over; and it is sad to think that two or three months after the survivors had been repatriated, they no longer existed as a crew. In the manner of sailormen, they had signed the articles of different ships for different voyages and were scattered over all the oceans.

After the first painful week in hospital Captain Freeman made a good recovery, and was soon looking forward eagerly to the arrival of the passenger steamer that would take him home to England. One morning, feeling strong enough, he decided to climb one of the mountain paths and look down upon Castries from above. Thirty miles away across the creased and shimmering sea the blue and airy profile of Martinique lay upon the horizon like a summer cloud. The sight affected him strangely, filling him with the illusion of having seen a pristine world.

On the 23rd June following his escape Captain Freeman was presented with that most coveted decoration, Lloyd's Medal: "In recognition of the skill displayed by him in his effort to save his vessel and her crew from the effects of the late terrible disaster at Martinique."



